



**IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR  
OUR VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS**

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## 1. WELCOME TO INDIA VOLUNTEER CARE!

We are very happy to hear that you are interested in volunteering or interning with us at IVC. We hope this information is helpful for you to make your travel decisions and plans.

Besides reading this document, we would also like to advise you to read all the information which is supplied on our website [www.indiavolunteercare.com](http://www.indiavolunteercare.com). We also have a project directory and further information in different introductory packets that you will receive upon finalising your booking. The information that you find here is of a more practical nature, aimed at making your stay in Pondicherry as comfortable as possible. In the following section is a brief introduction for our organisation; how and why we work, our current projects and plans for the future.

### 1.1 Our aims and motivations

India Volunteer Care is based and registered in the town of Pondicherry which is located in the state of Tamil Nadu, in Southern India. We are comprised of a small group of like-minded local people. We aim to identify and place international volunteers where they are most needed: in emerging, small scale, grassroots organisations that lack the necessary means and resources to attract and accommodate international volunteers, but who would benefit greatly from outside assistance and knowledge.

IVC is entirely distinct from some of the gap year agencies or 'ethical travel agents' that are widely known in the Western world; we are a registered NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) and thus do not make any profit from placing our volunteers. Rather we operate out of the genuine wish to maintain, strengthen and expand the NGO sector within our area. We do ask our volunteers and interns to pay a fee (as highlighted in Chapter 4) to cover our operational costs; however we work to ensure that this cost is kept to a bare minimum. This enables us to attract candidates from all walks of life, with a variety of experience and expertise – including undergraduate and postgraduate students, who are becoming proficient in their subjects but do not have the available funds to finance internships, or put their studies into practice.

There are a multitude of NGOs here that are desperate for voluntary help – whether it is from skilled or unskilled volunteers. From previous experience we know how hard it is for NGOs to attract and care for volunteers from abroad, so IVC was created with the aim for making an avenue through which international volunteers can come and offer their services.

Thus, India Volunteer Care, working in partnership with local NGOs, aims to identify and place genuine candidates who wish to become volunteers in a safe, structured and professional environment, with continuous communication and advice. This is in addition to a comprehensive induction training programme provided by our staff members.

## 1.2 Where we work and what we do?

As you will see from our website, IVC has a large number of NGOs that have registered with us to receive international volunteers. These organisations provide services throughout the welfare sector; providing social, economic, developmental, educational and environmental assistance. Each sector has its own specific problems and requirements from volunteers. There are 10 sectors in which the partners of India Volunteer Care operate. Each sector sub-divides into specific project concerns. The 10 main sectors are:

1. **Working with Children:** This is quite a broad category, as there are many avenues through which you may assist children in need here. We have organisations that work with street children, and those staying in domestic refuges. In addition we have a number of crèches, schools, orphanages and remedial schools which volunteers may work with. There are also a large number of special needs schools and orphanages that require our support. In this sector we need both skilled and unskilled volunteers. Unskilled volunteers can play, interact and adopt a peer/care role for all our vulnerable and unsupported children. There is also the opportunity to teach English, math and computer skills in our schools and tuition classes.

We also desperately seek trained professionals/experienced volunteers in this sector; many of the special needs schools and orphanages are badly under resourced, and are in serious need of people with any knowledge of therapeutic techniques such as physiotherapy, music therapy, occupational therapy etc. Also any teachers that could assist in reinvigorating standard modes of learning in schools would be of great use.

2. **Working with women:** There are many opportunities for skilled volunteers and/or professionals in working with women. We require people to assist microfinance groups in improving business practice and products, giving motivational support, marketing, debt and financial advice, in addition to creating avenues to different target markets. Microfinance has a large presence in developmental models out here – but there are a lot of problems inherent in its processes that we need to overcome. Many women are finding it difficult to repay their loans because of poor financial management, or poor business models. There seems to be an emerging debt culture, where many women take out several loans in order to repay previous debts/sustain their level of living.

Anyone that has a particular skill, craft or hobby that has the potential of generating income can also give training courses (even at the most rudimentary level) to our self-help groups that are in need of serious innovative ideas and new product templates in order to increase the success of their business. Interestingly we also have a number of male microfinance groups, which have been more successful (contrary to national statistics) – they have set up repair shops, tailors etc. You could also work with them to boost output if you would be interested.

We also work with several domestic refuges, family counseling centres and women's training institutes that would benefit from assistance in many different forms – counselors, befrienders, English/computer skills teachers etc.

3. **Youth Development:** (incl. sports, music, arts, English, tailoring, carpentry, computer literacy)  
This category works mainly with adolescents and young adults in after vocational, training centres, teaching new skills and instilling self confidence within the students. The youth normally come from poor, rural areas, and are in need of boosting their education and skill sets in order to find steady employment, thus working themselves out of poverty. There are both male and female groups.

4. **Capacity Building:** A lot of our NGOs are in serious need of good English speakers to assist with the administrative running of several departments within their organisation. This includes helping with accounts, funding applications, grants and private donations, marketing etc. to raise the profile and security of the NGO and thus build a stronger and more productive organisation. There is also a great need for technical support. We need web designers to create web pages for most of our NGOs, and also some volunteers to help train staff in computer proficiency.
5. **Health:** Recent statistics suggest that over 44% of children in Tamil Nadu suffer from malnutrition, as anemia, lack of fiber and various vitamin deficiencies are common problems in the South Indian diet. Therefore, there are a number of organisations that give nutritional advice through awareness programmes.

In the more rural and poor areas (including our tribal areas) we also have health centers which are in serious need of medical support - to assist in health visits and tend to general medical problems in the most remote areas which often do not have access to sufficient medical care.

6. **HIV/AIDS:** Although the AIDS epidemic was relatively late to reach India, it is becoming an increasingly and worryingly large problem. Roughly 5000 people in Pondicherry central city areas are known to have either HIV/AIDS. In Tamil Nadu the problem is far greater, where HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are among the highest in the country. Largely, infection is spread through unprotected heterosexual sex. We require volunteers to assist in AIDS awareness programmes, including the proper use of contraception, the stigma attached to AIDS and much more. There are also a number of AIDS counseling centres that would benefit from professional help.
7. **Agriculture:** The lives of agricultural workers are very hard in India. The decline of government subsidies and a combination of poor weather conditions and out of date, inefficient agricultural techniques have kept farmers and labourers at the very bottom of the poverty line. In Tamil Nadu and surrounding states, livestock are starving, crops are failing and there has been a massive increase in suicide rates among the agricultural community. Therefore we need people to assist us in teaching and developing sustainable agricultural techniques to farmers and to introduce new market ideas (such as organic farming.) Please contact us for more details.
8. **Environment:** Environmental issues in India are serious problem and, with the continuous increase in population, are becoming more and more pertinent. We work with a number of NGOs that would benefit from volunteers to assist in waste management schemes, rainwater harvesting and other sustainable activities. We are also looking for an intern/volunteer to design agricultural awareness programmes for our own organisations (please see below for more details).
9. **Tribal Community Development:** We work with two regions that have tribal communities: the Kalrayan Hills in Tamil Nadu, and also in mountainous regions in Andhra Pradesh. There, NGOs work on promoting self-determination and indigenous rights. In addition some agencies also supply basic medical care and educational programmes for the most remote areas that are lacking basic facilities. There are also economic development programmes in these areas that aim to set up steady trade and boost the local economy. Microfinance programmes are also carried out here as well.

**10. Gay/ gender advocacy:** In 2009 homosexuality was officially legalised in India, yet stigma and persecution is still a big problem that is widely present across Indian society. We work with an NGO that aims to mitigate this stigma through community awareness programmes and self-determination/gender advocacy among the homosexual community. There is also a counseling service for those who need it. We need volunteers to assist with updating the awareness programmes and widening the scope of the organisation. Any trained counselors would also be of great help for giving structural advice (counseling an actual patient is very difficult due to the language barrier.)

**At IVC we will only place a volunteer or intern in a position where we, and our partner NGOs, feel they will be of benefit. However the help that can be given is wide ranging, and has taken many forms in the past. Volunteers need to think creatively with the skills they have; there is so much space for assistance here that everyone – no matter how qualified or unqualified – can be of use.**

In the past we have had unskilled volunteers that have taught conversational English in remedial schools, or some of their hobbies at youth development centres. Volunteers have organised gym and art classes for local primary schools (which are completely void from the national curriculum) and taken on peer/care related roles for vulnerable children and those with special needs in our local orphanages.

Skilled volunteers in the past have developed business models for ailing microfinance groups, motivational business seminars, applied for funding and grants for some of our NGOs, aided in marketing plans and worked with local schools and orphanages to incorporate therapeutic concepts such as play and music therapy into their institution.

### **1.3 Our plans for the future**

Currently, out of the money IVC receives from its volunteers in the form of induction fees and accommodation, roughly 70% goes towards covering our operational costs; the rent of our office, bills and expenses, in addition to staff wages. The remaining 30% is currently being used to repay the initial costs of founding this organisation: paying for the furniture, website, computers and deposit for our premises. When this has been repaid, we aim to set up some projects of our own that will aid social, economic and environmental development within the Union Territory of Pondicherry, and the state of Tamil Nadu. Once the fees become available to us, we have the provisions to create the following projects:

**Remedial Schools in rural villages:** Under the current educational system here, as a result of the limited resources and learning capacities available in Government-run primary and secondary school, the vast majority of children in India attend evening tuition (or remedial) schools. These schools further the knowledge of the students on their school curriculum, help students with their English, and assist with exam revision in a bid to prepare children for higher education. As useful and widespread as these remedial schools are, they are fee paying institutions, and therefore are frequently unavailable to the poorer strata of society. This puts the children in poorer areas at a distinct disadvantage, making it far harder for them to reach the grade of academic skill required to attend university. IVC is in the process of setting up a free remedial school for local children in a fishing village near Pondicherry – the teachers' wages and resources will be funded entirely by IVC. As our organisation grows bigger, and we receive an increasingly large number of volunteers, we hope to expand this project to create more schools of a similar kind.

**Funding and grant information packs/lectures:** Since the reformation of the welfare system in India, and with the large increase in commerce and international investment, there are an increasingly large number of sources through which NGOs and charitable bodies can receive funding. For the small, emerging and grass-roots charities it is not the lack of available funding that impedes the delivery of services, but rather the lack of knowledge of who and how to apply to for grants. Currently there are a number of agencies that give lectures on what each type of charity is entitled to and an introduction to the application processes. However, the fees for such lectures are extortionately high (as much as 40,000 Rs) making the courses unavailable to those who need it most. IVC hopes to create its own course on this subject and hold free lectures and training days for NGOs that require such assistance. All of this knowledge is free under the Public Information Act (DATE) and is an excellent way of spurring development in the area by strengthening the NGO sector from within.

If you would like to assist us with any of these projects, please contact us via our email address:

[admin@indiavolunteercare.com](mailto:admin@indiavolunteercare.com)

## 2. INFORMATION PRIOR TO DEPARTURE

### 2.1 Visa

After making the decision to come to work as a volunteer or intern, there is a lot to take care of. We would advise you initially to apply for a tourist visa; which for most countries will grant you a 6 month stay, with a multiple entrance allowance. Internship visas are also a possibility for those that require them, but this is a more complicated process. Please contact us if you need one.

The visa application process for India has recently been privatised; so the application process is still finding its feet and can be long and arduous! Ensure you send off all of the correct documents and complete all of the forms fully, whether it be online or by hand. It is easier if you go to the visa office in person, but if this is not possible, just make sure you start the visa application process with plenty of time to spare before your departure.

Additionally there is significant deviation in visa fees and processing times so make sure you shop about; all of the visa companies and their prices can be found online.

**Keep in mind that many visas start the day it is issued, NOT the day you receive the visa or leave your home country. Be careful not to apply for the visa too early, as it will shorten your stay in India. Check with your local Indian consulate/embassy for up-to-date information.**

### 2.2 Flights

Flight prices vary greatly depending on which airline you use, what airport you fly in to, and what time of year you depart. Some good websites for finding the best fare for you are:

[www.skyscanner.com](http://www.skyscanner.com)

[www.dialaflight.com](http://www.dialaflight.com) (also useful over the phone if you hate computers!)

[www.kayak.com](http://www.kayak.com)

[www.statravel.com](http://www.statravel.com) (particularly good for special rates if you are a student, under 26 or work as a teacher. They also have an over-the-phone service and shops in most major cities). Domestic transfers are easily available in India, and can be quite cheap.

### 2.3 Insurance

**We ask that all of our volunteers take out a comprehensive travel insurance policy that covers their entire stay here.** Accidents can happen even to the fittest of people and it better to be prepared. With hundreds of insurance companies to choose from, check that coverage includes 'in case of hospitalisation' and 'in case of accidents on two wheels' if you are planning on using a scooter or moped during your stay.

### 2.4 What to bring

Here is a list of things we would advise you to bring on your trip. Pondicherry is a large city, so there will not be any problems if you forget most of the items on this list. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us.

- If you have a **laptop** to your disposal, it would come in handy to bring it; we have wireless internet in our guest house which you can be connected to. IVC has several computers, but when there are many people, you might have to share one. This would be useful especially if your placement involves administrative work, funding applications or research: however, if

you are unable to bring one, you will receive priority computer access so you can complete your work.

**Torch/flashlight:** Many volunteers now prefer to use the 'head lamps' commonly available in many outdoor activity stores in Europe and the US. We have just bought a generator for our guesthouse, but power cuts remain a problem in other project sites and in the streets at night.

**A small first aid kit:** We recommend you include liquid bandages/anti diarrhoea tablets/ alcohol prep.pads/ plasters/ ibuprofen. All of these items are also available at local pharmacies, and we have a small supply at our guest house for emergencies.

**Toiletries:** Bring enough for your first week or so. Most things such as shampoo and toothpaste can easily be bought here in India (thus supporting our local economy) but there is not a great deal of choice among leading market brands.

**A DEET containing insect repellent:** Mosquitoes are a constant hazard (and annoyance) so it is good to be prepared. The best repellents contain + 50% DEET. Again, mosquito repellent is available here although not widely to this strength, so it is better to bring ample supplies!

**A mosquito net:** Preferably impregnated with Pyrethrin, this is the easiest way to protect yourself from insects whilst in bed. You can also buy nets, plug-in, electronic insect repellents and coils if you do not have one at home.

**Sun Protection:** The Indian sun is hot and strong. For those with lighter skin, come prepared.

**Liquid hand sanitizer:** You will often use your hands to eat so it is good to clean your hands with sanitizer first.

**Feminine hygiene:** Sanitary pads can all be bought here locally, however, many female volunteers prefer those they already know from home. Additionally, bring a good supply of bras and underwear; Indian underwear may be quite different to what you are used to back home! For males however, this should not be a problem.

**Toilet role:** Although easy to find, it is good to have one with you when you arrive as most Indian style toilets do not provide it.

**Clothing:** Travel light rather than heavy. Remember, you will be able to buy all forms of clothing (especially light, summer wear) once you are here. Bring a couple of long sleeve shirts/ blouses for protection against the evening mosquitoes.

**Mobile phone/charger:** Cell coverage is generally very good in India. Please make sure your phone is 'unlocked' before arriving so we can help you to buy a local SIM card to reduce your call-costs.

**A universal power converter:** Electricity in India is 230V to 240V, 50 HZ AC of the three-round-pin variety. Bring a converter with you.

**A photocopy of your travel documents and passport,** just in case!

## 2.5 Volunteer health

India is a country still in development, thus it is better to be careful when it comes to health issues and take all precautions prior to your departure and for the duration of your stay. You are likely to become ill once you have arrived in India; your resistance is down because of the change in temperature and humidity, and you will be exposed to new germs and viruses. Indeed some consider the Delhi belly a rite of passage for any incoming traveler! However, your body will soon acclimatise, so do not worry about it too much. It is advisable to take some vitamin tablets with you (especially Vitamin C) to keep your resistance up. The following is a set of guidelines only - seek professional advice for more details:

**Eating and Drinking:** We advise you to take no risks when it comes to eating and drinking - if in doubt don't eat it. Food is one of the great pleasures in India; enjoy it and be experimental but ensure you act intelligently. There are a number of good, clean restaurants to choose from, especially in the larger towns and cities.

Do not drink water directly from the tap; most restaurants offer free filtered water or bottled mineral water. Easily available in all towns, make sure the bottle is securely sealed before purchasing. If you stay at our guest house, **you will have a continuous, free supply of drinking water**; although we cannot guarantee this if you stay with some of our partner organisations.

If you would like to bring your own water filter, make sure the device you bring filters out viruses. You will have no problems washing/ showering using the tap water although it is best to use the bottled water for cleaning your teeth. Additionally the milk you buy here is safer if boiled before consumption – although you can buy fully pasteurised milk from some of the more expensive supermarkets.

For those who have particularly sensitive stomachs: peel all fruit, cook all vegetables and avoid salad unless you know it's been washed in 'safe' water. Also be careful with ice cubes: most are made with filtered water but not all.

**Doctors and Hospitals:** Pondicherry is well equipped with a number of private and public hospitals and doctors; so any emergency treatment or health care required during stay will not be a problem. All of the doctors will have been trained in English, so communication should not be a problem. If you do fall ill, we can guarantee that there will be a member of our staff there to support you and accompany you to any medical visits should it be required. You do have to pay for medical services here however, so ensure your travel insurance covers medical expenses.

**Vaccinations:** Get up to date guidance from your local doctor before travelling. Aside from the core vaccinations travellers are advised to have before departure (typhoid, hepatitis A and C etc.) other vaccinations can prove to be expensive. Unless you are working in a medical environment, we do not insist that you are inoculated against Hepatitis B. Similarly, the rabies jab is only necessary for when you are more than 24 hours away from a hospital; if your placement is situated in or around Pondicherry this will not be a problem. This decision is of course entirely up to you, and it is always better to be cautious.

**Diarrhoea:** many visitors to India succumb to traveller's diarrhoea (although amoebic dysentery is very rare). Remember that diarrhoea is the body's natural way of expelling bacteria – so don't worry about it too much. The most important thing is to avoid aggravating foods during your time of illness (like spicy curries) and to stay hydrated – so make sure to bring some rehydration sachets with you. If you follow these steps and rest for a day or two you should be fine. However if the problem persists or you develop a fever, a trip to the local doctor will suffice with prescribed antibiotics being the solution.

**Prescribed medication:** If you are on any prescribed medication, bring enough to last the complete duration of your time in India. You may keep supplies with us in our office or in the project office.

**Insect bites:** as mentioned in the previous section, bring a DEET containing insect repellent, mosquito net and wear long sleeves during the evening. Insect bites are a real annoyance; although malaria does not tend to be a big problem in Southern India, with the exception being the state of Goa.

Different governments prove to have different health advice for travellers coming to India – so it is better to check you're your own country's medical travel advice for up to date information before your departure.

## 3. UPON ARRIVAL

Having been accepted as a volunteer and having confirmed your travel arrangements with us, there is a full arrivals procedure in place to ensure that you feel comfortable and at ease when you take your first steps as a volunteer.

### 3.1 Pickup service

IVC can make arrangements for you to be picked up from the airport (in Chennai or Bangalore). However if you require this service, you should let us know in advance so we can send a driver for you.

Once you have passed through customs, our taxi driver will be waiting for you in the arrivals hall holding a sign with your name and '**IVC, Puducherry**'. Once you have been met, we can help you to call any friends or family to inform them of your safe arrival.

Naturally, we ask you to cover the cost of this service. **Please check the IVC website or contact us for the current rate.** You can pay this fee upon arrival in Pondicherry (this way you don't have to take Rupees with you, instead you can get them at a bank the next day after taking some rest).

### 3.2 Making your own way

It is also possible to come by public transport, although it is a little bit more complicated. From **Chennai Airport** you will have to get to the central bus station, either by bus or taxi. At the central bus station you will need to take a bus to Pondicherry. It will take about 3.5 hours. About 80 buses leave for Pondicherry every day - so don't worry if you miss one! There are also express buses available that will slightly shorten your travelling time. Ticket rates change periodically.

**Bangalore** is a further distance, but it is still possible to come by public transport. Firstly you need to take a bus or a taxi from the airport to the '**Magic Bus Stand**' (or central bus station) where you can find a bus to Pondicherry. Not as many leave from Chennai, but there are still at least 5 a day. It is also possible to take a night bus, as the journey takes around 7 hours. If you need assistance with timetables please let us know. The A/C bus will cost around 450 Rs. The correct platform for Pondicherry is quite hard to find; it is in the corner of a very busy and large bus station, but if you ask around and someone will give you the right directions.

By asking around several times, people will help you to find the correct bus. Make sure that the people that work on the bus (they sell you your ticket and often wear khaki shirts) know that you want to get off at the central bus station of Pondicherry. It will be a true Indian Experience; if you take a government bus, don't be surprised if the bus fits more people than you might think!

Upon arriving in Pondicherry call either the office on **0413-2211652**, or our Director Mr. Arasu on **9443287622**. If you do not have a mobile with you, there are many pay phones located in most of the street stalls that sell snacks, drinks, spices etc. Alternatively if you know your time of arrival, let us know in advance and we can have someone waiting for you.

Upon arriving in Pondicherry you can also get an auto rickshaw to our office which should be roughly Rs. 60-80.

### 3.3 Orientation

Once you have arrived, you will be given a day or two to rest and acclimatise to your new surroundings. When you have recovered from your journey, we will begin your orientation. This will include information on:

- Good places to eat and drink
- Ways to get around the town
- Internet cafes and public telephones
- Useful shops and public services
- Local banks/ATMs
- The Market
- The post office
- Interesting sights/ temples to visit.

### 3.4 Induction

When your orientation is complete, we will take you to our office to introduce you to our staff and other volunteers. We will then begin your induction, which will cover the following points:

- About 'India Volunteer Care'
- An introduction to your sector of work in India: the social, structural and economic problems present with the status quo, in addition to the role of the government and NGOs in mitigating these effects and developing this sector.
- An introduction to your project and/or the partner NGO you have chosen to work with. Your role within the organisation and what is expected of you.
- An explanation into our report and feedback procedures
- Accommodation options
- Your work schedule
- Health and safety issues in the communities, and on project sites.
- Safe keeping of your belongings (anything valuable such as passports, bank cards etc. may be stored in our office for safe keeping).
- Emergency contacts
- Signing of agreement.

You will be taken to your project on the following day. Of course, we will be available to provide you with any required assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week if you have any questions or difficulties whilst you are with us.

## 4. WHAT TO EXPECT DURING YOUR STAY

### 4.1 A Brief introduction about the Management and staff

Currently we have a small number of local staff that forms the main body of the IVC team. Our management team comprises of the following:



**S.M ARASU**  
**Director**



**FREDERICK M. ARASU**  
**Assistant Director**



**JENNY FRANCOISE**  
**Assistant Director**

Arasu is the initial founder and director of IVC, so his roles are numerous and varied! His main duties within the organisation consist of volunteer coordination, holding staff meetings, organisational expansion/liaison.

Freddy and Jenny are not as involved with the everyday running of IVC, though they do participate in important decisions involving the future of the organisation, and act as trustees. Freddy, Arasu's son, is still at university, but is around on his days off to assist volunteers with odd jobs.

## 4.2 Your role as a volunteer/intern

Since IVC is a small yet fast-growing organisation, we depend on our volunteers and interns for many activities and programs. You can really make a difference, but we ask a lot from you. Depending on your project choice you will often find yourself working fairly independently (especially for capacity building, grant applications, internships and programme developers), with a great deal left to your own initiative. For this reason, we ask the volunteers to be prepared for a challenge; to draw upon their own resources and skills and be willing to work out with their usual comfort zone. You may find some of the tasks a little overwhelming at first, but this is all part of the volunteering experience. Our staff will do their utmost best to be of assistance to you and to supply you with useful and constructive guidance. We can arrange outside assistance from university professors, researchers, and other NGO experts if required.

As IVC is still in the process of establishing itself, we are always in need of help from volunteers to assist with capacity building in our own organisation. It would be of great assistance if each volunteer would be willing, for a few hours a week, to assist in areas such as marketing for attracting future volunteers, admin tasks, updating our website and other related jobs..

## 4.3 Your project

Once you have selected the sector you wish to work in and informed us of your skills and motivations, we will find an organisation where your contribution is best suited. After recovering from your journey, and settling in to your accommodation we normally expect you to work after 2 or 3 days. We will introduce you to the partner organisations that you will be working with and, after a one-on-one briefing with a member of IVC; you will be introduced to the head of the organisation, and shown around the project sites. The following day, you will begin. From this point onwards, the outcome of the project is largely due to the success and motivation of the volunteer.

We will provide you with an information pack regarding your area of work, with hints, tips and some general information. We also have some teaching supplies and equipment that may be of use. Initiate your own work with some background research, and come with plenty of ideas, any resources if you can bring them, and lots of enthusiasm!

Upon arrival, you may discover that your skills and/or knowledge are best suited elsewhere – and therefore wish to change your project entirely. One of the benefits with IVC is that we are very flexible, and will do anything to accommodate your needs. Our driving force is to assist NGOs, and in order to do this we must think of each volunteer and project individually, with an innovative and open minded approach.

Sometimes, because of the emotional/physical/mental intensity of the work you will be doing, we recommend volunteers take on more than one project. This also gives you more exposure to the non-profit sector and wider Indian society. For example, volunteers in the past have taught English in village schools in the mornings, and worked on marketing and finance schemes for NGOs in the afternoon.

#### 4.4 General weekly time table

The work week runs from Monday through Friday, 9 AM-6 PM with weekends off. However, if your project requires time outside these hours your schedule will change.

Volunteers normally take a 1.5 hour lunch break at a time of day that suits them. Timetables may vary depending on the work you do – for example for those of you working in the remedial schools, your classes are mainly held in the early evenings – so we would not expect you to work a full day on top. Arasu is around in the early parts of the morning and evening, and all day Saturday and Sunday should you wish to discuss anything with him. Our staff meeting involves a weekly evaluation with Arasu, the other volunteers and interns about all the activities that have taken place in the previous week, in addition to any communications required for the following week.

For the placements that are further away from Pondicherry city, a member of staff will be available over the phone 24 hours a day should you need to make contact. If you are unable to come back to Pondicherry for our weekly staff meeting, we will maintain continuous communication by phone and email, in addition to sending a member of our team out to visit you frequently. Many volunteers travel back to Pondi during their days off, as this enables them to switch off from their work and socialise with the other volunteers.

#### 4.5 Accommodation

**Guest House:** Currently our IVC headquarters serves as both our main office and guesthouse for our volunteers whose projects are based in central Pondicherry. Our address is:

No.6, 10<sup>th</sup> Cross East  
Rainbow Nagar  
Pondicherry - 605 011  
Tel: 91-413-2211652  
Mobile: 91-94432 87622

**Facilities:** Our headquarters is a large house based a short distance from Pondicherry city centre, in a typical Indian neighbourhood, which is packed with local amenities. The office is situated on the second floor, with living quarters on the ground floor. We feel this is the best option for volunteers that are working in the area– especially during the first few weeks of your stay, as it is a way to get to know other volunteers well in addition to interacting fully with our staff. We have three large, airy bedrooms; two of which are en suite. Each bedroom has its own lock, and comes with a bed, storage facilities and fan. There is also a further bathroom, and two shower rooms. We also have a fully equipped kitchen, spacious roof terrace, dining table and lounge area for the volunteers to use at their disposal.

Our office currently consists of two modern computers with unlimited internet access, a scanner, photocopier and printer. We also have a generator, which means that you will not be plagued by the power cuts that frequent the area. We supply clean bed linen for all volunteers, so you do not need to worry about bringing your own. We also have a staff member that cleans the house daily. You can do your washing by hand, or alternatively there is a local launderette that washes and irons clothes.



**Rate:** This payment varies by year and by the type of accommodation you choose (**please refer to the website for current fees**). This price includes free and unlimited internet access, drinking water, toilet paper and as much tea and coffee as you can drink! We feel that this price is fair considering the standard of the accommodation, and is essential to cover our operational costs.

As space is limited, we may ask you to share a room; there is plenty of space to do this without compromising your stay here. Consequently, we also can also accommodate for couples should this be required. Of course, the nightly rate would be reduced for both yourself and your room mate if you both agreed on sharing.

If the guest house is fully booked during your stay, we will find you alternative accommodation in Pondicherry city centre; usually in the form of a furnished apartment. Normally we would not ask you to pay more than the nightly rate we charge at our own guesthouse.

**Home stay:** The home stay option is becoming increasingly popular. Volunteers stay and eat with a family in one of the communities you are actually helping. Although this means that you may not have easy access to internet, running water etc, the advantage is that you will be giving money directly to those people you want to help most. You will also quickly develop your skills in the local language. Costs

can be agreed with a family and will usually include food. To be fair to the family, we recommend a fee similar to those that you would pay for a guest house.

Usually, we would recommend that you stay in our volunteer guest house for a couple of weeks, so you can orientate yourself with India Volunteer Care and the Indian lifestyle before moving to stay with a family. This will also allow you to get to know the staff and the other volunteers.

**Partner Accommodation:** For volunteers that are situated out with Pondicherry in our rural communities, normally our partner NGOs will provide you with accommodation. You will receive more information once you have been given a specific project. We do inspect the accommodation before sending a volunteer there to ensure that it is of an appropriate standard.

Again we will ask you to pay a small nightly rate which will go directly to the NGO as a donation to cover the costs involved. It will not exceed 250 Rs/night unless you request a higher spec of accommodation, or if you would like food included in the price (normally we would suggest 30 – 50 Rs/meal).

#### 4.6 Finances

Since IVC is a NGO and is not a profit making organisation we ask each volunteer to pay a small fee for our services, in addition to paying for accommodation and food.

This one-off fee is currently **on our website** and applies to both interns and volunteers. It might seem awkward that we ask for a donation while you are going to work for IVC, but we have several reasons behind this cost;

1. By asking for a contribution, we are sure that only dedicated people will work for us; the ones that want to make a difference and are willing to give their all to see a programme work, over the ones who simply want a touristic-insight into welfare projects in the developing world.
2. The work that volunteers and interns do usually incurs some level of cost (transportation, stationary, staff resources etc) and rarely generates any money or funding with which we can pay for the accrued expenses.
3. We are, as are our partners, a non-profit organisation: we simply don't have the means to support volunteers and interns. If we had the means, we would have invested it in employing a permanent staff member, since this would make the work more sustainable.
4. The money from your induction fee goes straight towards funding our operational costs, and assists us in maintaining and developing our organisation, and in the future for funding our own projects.

The costs for accommodation and guidance will become less when you stay for a longer period of time (for periods of stay longer than 4 months, rent can be negotiated, and you only pay the induction fee once.) It is more favorable to IVC and our partners to have volunteers and interns to stay for several months, as more constructive work can be achieved than in shorter periods of time. Also, during the initial weeks of coming to India you will need more guidance and support as you settle into your work, and become familiar with local systems. Please ask if you require more information.

## 4.7 Terms and conditions

Regardless of qualifications, our volunteers must be:

- Able to commit to a period of work that lasts at least one month.
- Proficient in written and spoken English
- In possession of a valid passport and visa.
- Above 18 years old.
- Able to finance their way to India, in addition to paying for their food and accommodation during their stay.
- In possession of a comprehensive travel insurance policy.
- Up to date with any necessary vaccinations.
- In agreement to adhere to the dress and behaviour codes outlined in the following chapter.

**N.B.** Additionally, if you are working with children or vulnerable individuals, we ask volunteers to produce a CRB certificate, or equivalent (e.g. Scottish Disclosure Form). This is in order to prove that our volunteers have no previous criminal convictions involving children or at risk persons. Any information we receive regarding volunteers will be kept under strict confidence, and not be shared with any members of staff, or other volunteers. We hope you understand the necessity for such a procedure and are willing to cooperate fully. Please contact us if you require more information.

**Finally, if you have to leave your placement early as a result of any unforeseen circumstances, we will not be able to refund your induction fee. However, if you have paid in advance for your accommodation you will be fully refunded for any period of time you do not stay with us.**

## 4.9 Extra services on offer

Beyond helping you with settling in on your placement, finding you good accommodation and introducing you to the local way of life, IVC can also assist you with the following services should you require them?

**SIM card:** It is a little bit complicated to purchase an Indian SIM-card, but it does come in handy! With a pre-paid SIM, it is cheap to stay in contact with all the new people you meet in India. To obtain a contract (even for a short period of time) for a SIM-card, we will need a passport size photo and a photocopy of your passport and visa. One of the staff members will make sure you will get the right contract. You can buy a new phone here from as little as Rs.1300, but an Indian SIM card should also work on your mobile from home, so long as it is 'unlocked.'

If you are travelling before coming to us and you want to purchase a SIM-card yourself, keep in mind that they work with so called 'zones' in India. To call within a zone is cheap, but to call outside one is much more expensive and the receiver of your call will have to pay for your phone call as well. So think about where you will be staying the longest and buy one that covers that zone.

**Meditation and Yoga Classes:** We can put you in contact with local teachers that have received good reports from previous volunteers. Of all the places in the world, if you want to learn a bit about Yoga or meditation, India is the place to do it.

**Cooking Classes:** If you are interested, we can arrange traditional Indian cooking classes.

## 5. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO INDIA AND LIFE IN PONDICHERRY

Pondicherry (which was officially renamed three years ago by the Government administration as Puducherry) is a Union Territory situated in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, 165km south of Chennai. Within the Union Territory there is the large city of Pondicherry, which acts as the central hub for cultural, religious and societal events. Formally colonized by the French, Pondicherry (commonly known as 'Pondy') gained formal independence in 1952. However, many remnants of French rule remain, which have been fused with both traditional and modern Indian and Tamil culture to produce a unique city, with a totally different atmosphere to surrounding regions.

The old town has a distinctly French feel: with wide, open boulevards, French colonial architecture, patisseries and coffee shops, in addition to a proportionately large number of French citizens. However, do not be fooled into thinking that you will not get a true Indian experience during your stay here – every street is also packed with Indian vitality: with an overwhelming number of snack and chai stalls, markets, restaurants, street displays, temples, musical performances, festivals and holidays, not to mention the overwhelmingly-crazy traffic. Thus IVC can ensure that you will not only have the chance to experience the 'authentic India,' but be thrown head first into all of the colourful sights, tastes, sounds and (of course) smells that this vibrant country has to offer.

You can get more information on Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu on several internet sites. We recommend the following:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puducherry>  
<http://www.pondicherry.ind.in/>  
<http://tourism.pondicherry.gov.in/>  
<http://www.tamilnadutourism.org/>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_Nadu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu)

Any good guide book should also offer further information. Upon your arrival to Pondicherry, we will orientate you to the area; pointing out interesting sites and restaurants to visit. There is also a tourist information pack for you to look at in our office. If, in the mean time, you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us.

### 5.1 Life in India and the Indian culture

During your stay you will experience many cultural differences; so we have prepared a brief introduction in order to inform about some of the different aspects of Indian life that you will encounter. Please ensure you read this section carefully, and take on board our comments and come prepared to meet our expectations. Although our staff are used to working with volunteers from a variety of different cultures, they have never left the country so can only go so far in understanding the culture from which you originate. Of course, this is the same for you in understanding the Indian culture. To benefit fully from this experience come with an open mind, a respectful and patient attitude, and be prepared for compromise.

Some volunteers upon arrival have experienced a 'culture shock.' When you move to a new place, you're bound to face a lot of changes. Things in India certainly are different, which is exciting and stimulating, but it can also be overwhelming at first. It's natural to have difficulty adjusting but if you stay calm, observe and learn, and keep things in perspective, you'll probably find that your difficulties will pass. Most importantly do not isolate yourself, keep your sense of humour and keep yourself mentally and physically busy. Of course, if you need any assistance or support from our staff we would be more than happy to help you.

## 5.2 Key cultural differences

India's rich and varied culture means that you will meet a number of differences in terms of attitude and customs. These traditional values are perhaps most evident in the rural areas where many of our voluntary placements are, so please take them into consideration.

- Indians often use a side-to-side head gesture to signal agreement rather than disagreement. This can be confusing at first, but you will soon get used to it!
- Indians have a difficult time saying no or that you're doing something in the wrong way, so be sure to ask for their opinion, maybe several times (although not in a confrontational way as this will only make matters more difficult).
- Indians kinship systems and work environments are structured in a highly hierarchical fashion. So some of your employees and friends might not say any relevant information unless asked. Furthermore, if you question or criticise processes or plans a great deal without constructive alternatives, little will be achieved apart from isolating yourself from your colleagues. The Indian way strongly revolves around 'going with the flow' but of course, if you think there is room for improvement any practical comments will be warmly and gratefully appreciated.
- European/Western people are very punctual in comparison to Indians. When you settle a meeting and arrange a time for it, don't be surprised if the meeting starts later.
- Although Western toilets are becoming more commonplace, the Indian squat toilet is still prevalent. You won't find toilet paper in the public toilets as the Indians tend to favour the 'left-hand and water' technique. However, toilet paper is easily available from shops so we recommend carrying a roll with you. Please note that public toilets tend to be very dirty. You will often find cleaner facilities in restaurants and hotels.
- The left hand is considered 'unclean'. As mentioned above, Indian toilets are not supplied with toilet paper, so people use their left hand to clean themselves. It's important to keep this difference in mind for most practices. Try to avoid touching your face or other people with your left hand. When you are eating you should only use your right hand; a skill in itself! This rule also applies to when you are handing over money or passing things to people.
- Be sure to take off your shoes before you enter a house. Often you see a pile of slippers in front of the door where you should leave yours too. This is seen as a sign of respect and is followed by peoples of all religions.

- In India, people have a healthy dose of curiosity and they might ask you all sorts of questions that you didn't expect, like what you earn, how much your blouse costs, what your parents do etc. Also, questions about money are not considered impolite here. So in such situations, do not take offence and use conversations like these to learn more about the Indian culture; you in turn are free to ask as many questions as you like.
- It is also not considered particularly rude to stare at people here; especially if you are clearly a foreigner or dress differently. However, address the situation if you feel uncomfortable.

### 5.3 Gender differences

In the south of India gender equality is considered much better than in the north. However structural, economic, and social differences are still woven into the fabric of society here. Consequently, there are many social rules and practises related to gender that you will encounter during your stay. For example, if you are a man it is inappropriate to shake the hand of a woman on your own initiative (it can be seen as imposing) however if a woman takes the initiative to offer you her hand, there is no problem. These sorts of practises are evident in all aspects of social life, in areas such as clothing and public transport. In the following sections we will try to describe some of these rules, but this gender difference is something to bear in mind during general interaction with the people here; but do not let this deter you from interaction with members of the opposite sex, as this is fine so long as it is done respectfully.

### 5.4 Clothing

There is a strict dress code for women in India; this is a question of cultural sensitivity and values, and should be respected at all times whilst on placement. At the very least, we ask that our volunteers **cover their knees and shoulders**, and not to wear low cut tops.

As a female volunteer it is best to buy a **churridhar** (a long blouse with pair of trousers) or **saari** upon arrival, especially when you are visiting communities often. Women especially are not happy to see other women dressed in tight tops or short skirts, since they still associate this with immoral behaviour and will look down on you because of the way you dress. When you would like to wear 'western clothes' make sure that your tops are not too tight and that they have sleeves as men often associate tight clothes with sex. Be aware that Indians don't swim in a bikini or bathing suit, but that they go into the sea almost fully dressed. It is advised that at the very least you wear shorts with a t-shirt; otherwise you will attract a lot of attention.

For men the dress code isn't as strict. You can wear long trousers, shorts and t-shirts and shirts. They can also buy a traditional dhoti (Indian white skirt for the upper class) or the lungee (a blocked or striped skirt that you can wear during the evenings or weekends).

Dressing in accordance with Indian fashion is also another good opportunity to gain insight into the Indian way of life – so have fun with it!

## 5.5 'Immoral behaviour'

Indians are very black and white about what is good and what is bad. Smoking and drinking (again, especially for women) is associated with immoral behaviour. When you smoke, it is better not to do it on the streets, although it is no problem to smoke on our roof terrace at our guesthouse, in most bars and restaurants, and in quiet corners of the projects (although preferably not during your working hours).

As a female, if you drink alcohol in a bar or restaurant you might attract some attention. But this should not stop you from ordering a drink or having a cigarette; it is important for people to see that you can be a good and moral person in addition to undertaking such activities.

Concepts about appropriate sexual activities however are more firmly cemented in the Indian psyche: sexual relationships out with marriage are frowned on considerably, especially among women. You are free to do as you please during your stay in India, but expect a cold reception if you are seen to be having casual or numerous partners or if you act inappropriately with any members of the local community. This applies to both men and women.

This is different if you are here with your partner, although only mild displays of public affection are considered appropriate. It may be easier for you if you introduce yourselves as a married couple, particularly in the more rural areas.

We would like to remind you that whilst on your placement, you are an ambassador to our organisation, and expect you to act responsibly and respectfully. **We operate a zero tolerance policy towards drugs and ask you to refrain from using them during your stay with IVC.**

## 5.6 Religion

Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry are home to a wide variety of different religions. There are Hindus, Muslims, Jains, and Christians amongst others. One of the first questions that people will ask you is 'what is your religion?' You have no need to hide your beliefs, although people may be puzzled if you tell them you have no religion. Cultural interchange is one of the key by-products of volunteering: come prepared to learn and experience the way others live. You will also have plenty of opportunity to visit the local temples. Please remember that in most cases you will have to take off your shoes before entering, and dress conservatively.

## 5.7 Food

One of the great attractions of India is the food. Often spiced, the majority of food eaten is vegetarian. However, you can easily find meat or fish in the larger towns. The degree of spiciness in the food varies between dishes. Don't be afraid to ask if you have any doubts. Most restaurants are open from morning through till night.

When eating, remember that it is customary to eat with your hands (or right hand, to be more specific). Although it is not an obligation (spoons and forks are readily offered), eating with your hands lends a whole new dimension to the experience of eating. You will find 'wash hands' (sinks) in all restaurants to clean your hands before you dive in. Many volunteers also bring small containers of hand-sanitizer. Again, this can be bought locally should you wish.

## 5.8 Bargaining and shopping

Most towns have a wide range of shops and markets. Colourful and crowded, the markets are an experience that everyone should try. You will find jewels, metals, cloths, silks, sculptures, and of course a wide selection of foods and spices. You will have to negotiate the price though, a skill that takes a while to acquire. This particularly applies for market stalls and in shops where the prices are not clearly labelled, in addition to when you are buying more than one item.

## 5.9 Local transport

Getting around can be fun. By far the most common way of moving around town is by Auto rickshaw, a small, enclosed three wheeler taxi. Like the markets, you will have to negotiate the price before you step in.

Alternately, you can move around town by taxi, renting a cycle (especially in Pondicherry) or even renting a moped/motorbike. mopeds can also be a great way of getting out into the local communities or to the beaches. (See insurance for more advice).

For longer distances, there are buses and trains. At first sight, public transport in India can seem chaotic to the outsider. However, you will soon come to appreciate how well organised the transport system actually is. Long distance trains offer a great experience to the traveler. We will give you any advice necessary when you need to book tickets.

There is quite a strict etiquette for people when travelling on the buses. On a bus which is rather full, you will notice that the men enter through the front door of the bus and the women through the back door. This is to avoid sexual harassment in overcrowded busses. Please make sure to enter through the right door. Once in the bus, you will see many benches with only women and many with only men. Only when a husband and wife travel together will they sit next to each other. If there is an empty seat next to a couple, check who is sitting on the outside; if it's a woman and you are a woman, you can sit beside her, similarly if it is a man and you are one too, you can sit next to him.

# 6. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

If you are based near the city of Pondicherry, you will have unlimited access to any amenities you can think of. Therefore places such as hospitals, banks, ATMS, pharmacies, dentists, police stations, post offices etc are widely available. If however you are placed further afield, in our more rural projects – amenities might be limited. If this is the case we will inform you of anything extra you should bring, and take as many measures as possible to ensure your stay is both comfortable and convenient.

## 6.1 Contacting home

There are a variety of ways through which you can contact friends and family back home.

At our guest house, we offer unlimited free **internet access** (both on our own computers and via a wireless router) and supply head sets and web cams so our volunteers can email and use Skype

Alternatively there are a great number of internet cafes throughout Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu; this is normally the only way the local communities have access to the internet.

**Calling** home is also possible, and not as expensive as one might think. Many internet cafes also offer international call services, starting from 2 Rs. /minute. Additionally, if you purchase an Indian SIM card out here you can call home and send messages from your mobile – average rates are about 7 Rs/minute to call an international landline, and 5 R.s to send an SMS.

There is also an efficient **postal service** here, although it does take up to three weeks for parcels and letters to arrive in/from the West. There are faster post services, although these are much more expensive.

## 6.2 Money

The currency in India is the Indian Rupee (INR) which is divided into 100 paise. It is a closed currency, which means you will not be able to change your money for the Indian currency out with the Indian borders. This is no problem though; because no matter what time you arrive in India, there will be an exchange office open at the airport.

All major currencies are accepted here, as are travellers' cheques and major credit cards. ATMS can be found in every city and town, and are easily accessible. As an added security, IVC would recommend that volunteers bring two forms of accessing cash over. For example, if you are bringing a credit card, we would also advise that you bring maybe \$100 in travelers' cheques, or hard cash. This is not only to cover you in case you lose your card and need to wait for the arrival of a new one, but also in case your bank blocks your card upon arrival. This has happened to several of our volunteers. **It is best to inform your banks of your pending departure**, however this does not mean they will not still block your card, as many of our volunteers have discovered! Although this problem does not take long to rectify, it is better to have some cash to fall back on in cases of an emergency.

## 6.3 Personal safety

Although India is a very safe place to live and travel in, we would advise our volunteers to pay attention to the following points:

**Pick Pockets and Thieves:** As in all countries, India has its own number of petty criminals that prey on tourists. Although we have not had many problems previously with our volunteers, we ask them to take the following precautions:

- ❖ Lock away all valuables in your room, or alternatively we can keep them in a safe in our office. Similarly if you are leaving your bike somewhere, ensure it is locked securely.
- ❖ Lock all doors and windows before leaving the guesthouse
- ❖ Keep your bag with you at all times when you are out and about. Bags with double fastenings or money belts are harder for thieves to get in to.

**Sexual Harassment.** Some, but by no means all, Indian men have the wrong perception of Western women (especially when ones that wear Western clothes). From misleading media portrayals, some people think Western women are far more liberal in their sexual behaviour and practices. This can lead to various forms of sexual harassment (most of the time these are just minor incidents like giving you a pinch on the bum, trying to make physical contact, etc). When you experience any inappropriate

behaviour, it is very important to act immediately. The best response is to make a big deal about the misbehaviour and to attract as much attention from other people as possible, so the person harassing you will feel very embarrassed. It is also acceptable for you to slap the man in question, if you feel the situation requires it. People surrounding you will be as angry about the event as you are and will assist you (it is considered very inappropriate to act in such a fashion). Sometimes you might find that some men around you start to laugh, but that is just because they are feeling very uncomfortable. Cases such as these are very rare here, and normally women will feel completely safe – this is just a small warning to prepare you in case it should happen.

We would **not recommend** any volunteers walking home alone after 10.30p.m., especially if you are a female. This is purely because there are less people on the streets, and it can be very dark if there is a power cut in the neighbourhood. Walking in larger groups however, is fine, and similarly taking an auto by yourself will pose no problem.

These points have been mentioned not in order to scare any of our volunteers; many may have far worse preconceptions about personal safety in India than those outlined above. However, with any new country and culture, and indeed in any densely populated space, it is important to be sensible and cautious. If you would like any further advice, again you may contact us via email or over the phone.

#### **6.4 When to go - Climate and festivals**

The climate of Tamil Nadu is tropical in nature with little variation between summer and winter temperatures. April-June is the hottest summer period with the temperature rising up to the 40°C mark. November-February is the coolest winter period with the temperature hovering around 20°C, making the climate quite pleasant.

In the state of Tamil Nadu the monsoon starts between October and December. Prepare for heavy thunderstorms and lots of water, although it does not usually rain all day every day – some hours of sunshine will remain for those who love the sun! Do not forget to bring adequate rain clothing, and a good umbrella. There is no particular time of year we recommend our volunteers to arrive – each season is enjoyable and has its benefits as well as its disadvantages.

Pondicherry has many cultural festivals to its credit. Like most of India, the biggest festival time is in January, although there are at least a few important festivals and cultural events taking place every month. Another important time in Tamil Nadu is August/September, when the harvest festival takes place, and ‘wedding season’ commences. The various festivals include: Masimagam, Villianur Car Festival, Veerampattinam Car Festival, De Facto Function, Fire Walking Festival, Fête de Pondichéry, Ariyankkupam Madha Car festival, All Souls Day, International Yoga Festival, Pongal, Bastille Day, Mangani Festival etc.

#### **6.5 Language**

In Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Pondicherry almost everyone speaks Tamil (roughly 80%). For many of our volunteers this has proved a very difficult language to grasp: there are over 250 different vowel combinations alone! However, you are received very well if you make an effort to learn some basic words and phrases. We will give you a few basic tips upon arrival, but the best way by far to learn is on the job.

The widespread level of spoken English in India may surprise the volunteers who come to stay with us. The national newspapers and many magazines are printed in English, making it easy for you to catch

on current affairs. Many schools (English mediums) are taught completely in English, and in non-English schools (here, Tamil mediums) English is a mandatory subject. Therefore, most people speak at least Basic English. However, Indian English can be very different to what we have been taught at home; the accent and specific ways of saying things can cause confusion. This also is the case in reverse; some Indians will find it hard to understand your accent at first. **When you are speaking to non-fluent people, try to simplify your sentences and speak clearly.** With Pondicherry being a past French colony, French is also spoken, but not to the same degree as English. Some schools offer Hindi as an additional language, but good Hindi speakers are not as common in this region.

### **And off you go...**

We hope this file has answered any questions you might have about our organisation – however please contact us by phone or email if you should have any queries. If you would like to speak to a previous volunteer about their experiences with our organisation, we can supply you with their contact details. We look forward to hearing from you soon, and hope you are looking forward to your stay with us.

Warm wishes and regards

**The IVC team**