



## FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT *WORLD WATER CORPS* TRAVEL TO WEST BENGAL, INDIA

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

This document contains comments and observations of past *World Water Corps* volunteers. The goal of providing this information to you is to make you fully aware of what to expect during your trip so that you may prepare in a way that will ensure you enjoy your participation to the fullest. Based on comments from previous volunteers, we understand that it is not the challenging and unexpected situations encountered during the trip that made some volunteers uncomfortable, but the lack of foreknowledge of the daily situations. Lack of awareness produces poor planning and poor planning leads to unpleasant results. Thus by providing this information, we hope to minimize the possibility of any unpleasant experiences during your upcoming adventure as a *World Water Corps* Volunteer.

It has been our experience that as a volunteer, the level of satisfaction or frustration you gain from this trip, will be directly related to your willingness and flexibility to plan, work and coordinate with all Water For People and non-Water For People team members. Your expertise combined with the understanding of the social, cultural, and economic situation of our in-country partners will result in a great team and a rewarding experience.

Finally, always remember that as a *World Water Corps* volunteer, you are Water For People's eyes in the field and your observations, comments and recommendations are the only way this program will continue to grow and maximize our resources as we seek to obtain sustainable results throughout the less developed world.

### **TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION**

#### **How can I get to Kolkata?**

Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) is a major population center with a busy international airport. There are numerous carriers that fly into Kolkata; however, not all carriers have daily flights. Depending on your carrier, you may not be able to get a direct flight to Kolkata on your preferred arrival date. An alternative is to fly into New Delhi or Mumbai and then take a domestic flight to Kolkata, although this will add time to your journey. There is a large variance in prices on flights to Kolkata, so shop around for a good fare. *World Water Corps* volunteers traveling from the United States should plan to spend two days traveling to Kolkata. A ballpark cost from the U.S. in 2007 was \$1,700.

### **Is public transportation available?**

There are a number of modes of travel in and around Kolkata:

- The three-wheeled auto-rickshaw or “Took-Took” is cheap, exciting, and slightly crazy. Used mostly in town or for short hauls.
- Private or shared taxis. More expensive than the auto-rickshaw. Also used in town or for longer trips. Metered cabs double the fee on the meter. It is recommended that you purchase a prepaid taxi voucher inside the airport before getting into a taxi. It removes the need to negotiate and ensures the best deal. You should see a taxi window in the main terminal.
- Public buses. Very cheap, extraordinarily crowded and slow. If you want to get close to the people—very close to the people—then take the bus. There are private luxury buses that usually travel between major destinations.
- Trains. If you plan to extend your trip outside of Kolkata and have the time, consider the train. A train trip across India is an extraordinary visual experience. The accommodations vary from 1AC (Air Conditioned) Class which is first-class (with a private car attendant) to the lowest class which allows small farm animals in the cars. 2AC Class is a good mix of comfortable accommodations and exposure to your fellow travelers.

Expect to bargain with the auto-rickshaw and a few taxi drivers. It is best to agree on the fee before getting in. The bus fares and train tickets are fixed and can be purchased at a travel agency (for a fee) or at the station with a long line. People do not queue up, so it can seem a bit crazy.

### **What is required to enter/exit the country?**

A visa is currently required to enter India. The following was taken from the U.S. Passport Service: <http://www.us-passport-service-guide.com/india-visa.html#india-visa-requirements>.

### **India Travel Visa Types**

There are 10 types of India travel visas: tourist, transit, entry, business, employment, research, missionary, journalist, and conference. Apply for a tourist visa.

### **India Visa Requirements**

India visa requirements include, but are not limited to:

- passport with a minimum validity of six months
- two recent passport photos
- supporting documents
- completed India travel visa application form
- India visa fee payment

Once you receive your India business or tourist visa, you have 90 days to use it.

### **India Tourist Visa (can be obtained online)**

An India tourist visa has a validity of six months to 10 years. The latter is a multiple-entry visa. Each entry has a limited duration of six months.

India tourist visas are usually issued the same day for walk-ins (at the Indian Embassy) who arrive before 12:30 p.m. Applications that are mailed in take 10 business days.

The fee for the India tourist visa depends on the length of validity. The fees are \$60 for up to six months, \$85 for six months to one year and \$150 for more than one year and up to 10 years.

There are a number of private companies that can assist in obtaining your Indian visa. They can get it very quickly in an emergency for an additional fee.

### **MONEY**

#### **What is the local currency and can I use U.S. dollars?**

The currency in India is the Rupee. One U.S. dollar is equivalent to approximately 39 Rupees (R) (early 2008). For most everyday purchases at stores, restaurants, and street vendors, visitors should expect to use Rupees. Dollars are accepted in larger shops, hotels, and restaurants that cater to tourists. In rural areas, Rupees are usually the only currency accepted. In dealing with the local economy, try to keep as much money in small bills as possible. Many places do not have exact change or at least deny they have change. Change is hard to come by for small vendors, and visitors are thought to have lots of money, and to be able to pay high prices for these services. Shopkeepers sometimes raise prices four times over when a foreign tourist asks. Currency exchanges can be easily found in the cities and at the airports. However, past **World Water Corps** volunteers found ATMs to be the most convenient way to obtain Rupees. The ATMs usually dispense larger bills. Remember to alert your bank or credit card provider that you will be traveling in India.

#### **Will it be possible to use an ATM, traveler's checks, or credit cards in India?**

ATMs are abundant in Kolkata and other medium to large cities and have been used by past **World Water Corps** volunteers. Credit cards are widely accepted in the cities. Travelers' check bureaus are available in the cities. Do not expect to use credit cards or travelers check in rural areas.

### **FOOD AND LODGING**

#### **What are typical accommodations?**

There is an enormous variety of accommodations in Kolkata and India. Water For People in-country staff will make arrangements for you to stay in a centrally-located hotel or lodge in the \$40 to \$80 per night range that offers basic, but pleasant, accommodations and good security. Rooms will usually have private bathrooms and showers (but not always hot water). Typical rooms are equipped with air conditioning, pillows, bedding, and towels. Breakfast is often included with the price of the room and dinner is generally available at a reasonable price. Rates for double-occupancy are adjusted upward slightly, but offer a much better value per person.

Volunteers should expect to spend a few nights at much more rudimentary facilities in the field, where they can expect a bed, mosquito net and a bucket shower. These facilities are much more affordable at \$10 to \$20 per night.

**Is tap water safe to drink?**

DO NOT DRINK THE WATER unless it has been boiled as in tea or coffee. DO NOT HAVE ICE IN YOUR DRINKS. Most hotels will have water storage tanks on the roofs and this water is fine for bathing (with soap) and washing clothes, but it is in no way safe for drinking. City distribution systems are comprised by illegal connections, unstable pressures, and other issues. Bottled water is widely available at grocery stores, gas stations, hotel dining rooms, etc. Check to make sure the plastic seal on the water is intact before you accept the bottle.

**What types of food and drink are available in India/Kolkata?**

Typical beverages include bottled water, soda, wine, beer, tea, and coffee. A typical Indian restaurant will offer vegetarian, chicken, fish, and curry dishes, served with French fries, or rice. Many of the restaurants categorize themselves as “veg” (vegetarian) or “non-veg” (non-vegetarian). In rural areas, there will be limited selection. Most of the small restaurants usually offer only vegetarian, fried fish, or chicken and rice. The restaurants themselves may not look sanitary, but the food is usually fine as long as it is served hot. Depending on the season, a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables may be available. If you eat them, wash and peel them yourself. Do not eat at street stands.

**Are local utilities reliable?**

Visitors are likely to experience occasional, brief (less than one-day) power outages and water shortages in urban areas. In rural areas, electrical power is spotty if available, and tap water is not available. It is a good idea to keep a small flashlight with you.

**Is Internet service available?**

Some hotels offer an internet café or even wireless service; however, many do not. Internet cafés are available in most cities and towns.

**CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT**

**How do Indians greet each other and visitors?**

India has four major languages and hundreds of minor dialects. In West Bengal (Kolkata), Bengali is the official language. English is the common language of business and is widely spoken in the larger cities. However, very few of the rural village residents are fluent in English.

“Namaste” is widely used as a greeting throughout India meaning, “I salute the God within you.” A standard Bengali greeting is “Namaskar” with a similar meaning. When spoken to another person, it is commonly accompanied by a slight bow made with hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointed upwards, in front of the chest. “Namaskar” is also an appropriate response or return greeting. Shaking hands is very common, although in more rural conservative areas, the women may be reticent to shake hands. In rural areas they may dot your forehead (your third eye) with a red or white pigment. Also, the women may wish to pat the tops of your shoes as a sign of respect. Gently trying to persuade them not to do this is considered appropriate.

## Frequently-Asked Questions about World Water Corps Travel to Kolkata, India

### **How do people dress?**

Indians dress conservatively, in pants or a long skirt or a sari. Although many Indian women don't wear pants, they seem to expect that women from the U.S. often will. It may be considered impolite for women to wear shorts, or tank tops, however. Men can wear pants or shorts, but most Indian men will wear pants, while shorts are more common for farmhands or laborers.

### **What about the begging?**

India and particularly Kolkata have some of the highest levels of poverty on earth. You will see people living in plastic tarp tents or entire families sleeping cooking, eating on the sidewalk. You will see small children as well as maimed and crippled persons (of all ages) begging on many street corners. Most of the beggars are not aggressive, but some are persistent and you can expect to be followed down the street by a child repeating demands for money. If you give to one beggar, expect that information to travel throughout the local area with near miraculous speed, and you will be singled out for additional requests. Water For People requests that you do not give gifts.

## **TRIP PREPARATION AND PACKING SUGGESTIONS**

### **What immunizations are recommended?**

**World Water Corps** volunteers are encouraged to check with their doctors, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) or a travel clinic before traveling to India.

### **How can I protect myself from malaria?**

Visitors to India should take prophylactic malaria medications before, during, and after their trip. Exact regimens vary with different medications. Bed-net use is strongly encouraged, and nets are widely available at hotels. Long sleeves and pants are suggested for the evening, the time during which malaria is most likely to be contracted.

### **What specific supplies might be useful?**

Past **World Water Corps** volunteers have found the following items useful:

- Shower shoes/flip flops
- Mosquito repellent (30 percent DEET)
- Flashlight or headlamp for power outages or work after dark
- Umbrella or raincoat for rainy periods
- Travel alarm clock or watch (clocks are not always available at hotels/lodges)
- Sunscreen and a hat
- First-aid kit, including Band-Aids, Imodium, Tylenol, and a thermometer
- A few easy-to-transport, high-energy snacks for long days in the field
- Detergent for washing items in bathroom sink, although laundry service is usually available for a fee at hotels/lodges
- A voltage adaptor for charging computers and digital cameras
- Backpack or bag to carry supplies (water, camera, papers, etc.) in the field
- Anything required to survive very long layovers and flights (books, iPod, etc.)

### **What supplies have past volunteers found unnecessary?**

Past **World Water Corps** volunteers have found the following items to be unnecessary (although requirements may be different for different people traveling under various circumstances):

- Iodine tablets or water filters (because of the availability of bottled water)

- Clipboards and other materials for the assignment (these will be provided by Water For People staff)
- Excessive amount of cash (ATMs are widely available in the cities)

### **MAPPING AND MONITORING ASSIGNMENTS**

#### **Who will our team work with?**

Mapping and monitoring volunteers will work in a team that typically includes one or two volunteers, one or two Water For People–India staff members, and one or two representatives from local partner organizations or local government.

#### **How will we get to the projects and villages?**

Private cars and drivers are provided by Water For People in India. The drivers may be Water For People in-country staff or hired drivers. Most villages are in remote rural or peri-urban areas and require a one to two-hour drive each way.

#### **What is a typical day like?**

Each day of the assignment will include visits to multiple project sites. Depending on the site characteristics and locations, between two and eight sites are typically visited by each team on each day. Teams will conduct activities as described in the protocol. While in the field, there is usually a small town restaurant for lunch but the team should always carry snacks in case one is not available. Working in the field can be tiring and the weather may be hot, sunny, and humid. Some of the sites are two hours each way outside of Kolkata, so you should anticipate several long days in the field. Volunteers should be prepared to protect themselves from the sun and drink lots of water. Teams will enter data on laptop computers in the evening or on a designated “data entry day.”

#### **Where will I go to the bathroom?**

Many of the places where we will visit do not have sanitary facilities. You may find a rudimentary toilet, but be prepared to use open fields, if necessary. Most Indian toilets use water instead of toilet paper for cleansing. Past volunteers have recommended having your own toilet paper with you at all times and a bag to put the garbage in for later disposal. Bringing hand wipes or gel cleaner is a good idea.

#### **Will Water For People provide supplies for the assignment?**

Yes, Water For People in India will provide the necessary forms, writing implements, clipboards, digital cameras (for official pictures), laptops, and other supplies required to complete the assignment. However, volunteers may be asked if they can bring some additional digital cameras or laptops if there are not enough to equip the whole team.