



VOLUNTEER INFORMATION PACK

CALCUTTA RESCUE (Kolkata)

Volunteering abroad can be a very rewarding and valuable experience, offering a challenge both personally and professionally and providing the opportunity to gain new skills and experiences.

We are pleased that you have chosen to volunteer with Calcutta Rescue Kolkata (CRK) and hope that your time working with CR will be a memorable and enjoyable experience. In order to help you as you prepare to go to Kolkata, this information pack has been compiled with essential information that we hope will be useful. As you should have already received information about the organisation, this pack focuses on the things you need to know as you arrange your trip to Kolkata and essential details about living and working in Kolkata.

1. COMMUNICATIONS

Calcutta Rescue Office

Location: **Calcutta Rescue Office, 85 Collins Street, Kolkata, 700 016**

E-mail: info@calcuttarescue.org

Phone: **+91 33 2217 5675**

Fax: **+91 33 2217 5675**

Postal address: **Calcutta Rescue, P.O. Box 9253, Middleton Row, P.O., Calcutta, 700 071**

N.B. Registered post or large items will not be accepted at this address. Please remember to ensure that mail is securely closed. Post for volunteers should not be sent to this address.

Website

The CRK website can be found at: www.calcuttarescue.org

2. BEFORE YOU GO

Guide Book

“India” published by Lonely Planet is probably the most useful. It includes information about almost everything, including where to stay and what to eat, along with maps, items to take, how to get there and what to see, both for India in general and Kolkata in particular.

Passport and Visa

You need a passport that is up to date for at least the complete period of your intended stay, but you should check the latest requirements with the Indian High Commission/Embassy. It is a good idea to pack a photocopy of your passport and visa and leave a photocopy with a willing relative or friend at home. It is also useful to e-mail details of your passport and visa to your e-mail address so you can easily access them if you lose them and are out of contact with people at home.

You will be asked to put down a contact person in India – it doesn’t matter who this is and choosing a hotel address from the Lonely Planet is fine. Just do not mention CR. You may also be asked to give an itinerary which can be devised from any guidebook e.g. Kolkata – Varanasi – Delhi – Agra – Rajasthan etc. Take details of your flights, as these may also be required. You should be aware that ***your visa will be valid from the date of issue, not the date of your arrival in India***, so do not apply too early.

Your visa will be valid for 6 months – unfortunately it is not possible to obtain a visa for 12 months. If you need a visa for more than six months you will need to leave India to get another visa. Please note that at present, your visa must have expired before an Indian embassy will issue another one. From India, the most reliable place to have a visa renewed is Bangkok, Thailand. The offices in both Nepal and Bangladesh frequently refuse. The Indian High Commission has a very useful website with details on where and how to obtain visas, supportive documentation required and you can also print off a visa application form. The busiest time for applications is August to December with long queues at the application offices.

Flights

Prices can vary considerably, depending on the airline flown and the travel agent. When booking your flight, you might want to consider the flight’s arrival time in Kolkata, allowing also for possible delays. The journey into the city can be less daunting for jet-lagged passengers if they arrive early in the day. Once you have given us your arrival details we will arrange for a current volunteer to collect you and take you to some accommodation. We advise people not to arrive by train, the stations are chaotic and it is difficult to meet people, unless they have travelled in India before. It can also be difficult to book a same day train ticket for long distance travel; the journey from Delhi to Kolkata is 17 hours at least.

The earlier you book your flight the better as all the cheap offers disappear very quickly. Peak season is from September to December, but it is still possible to get a good price through the bucket shops if you plan well in advance. A one-year open ticket is a little more expensive than a dated one-year return but it gives you flexibility.

The Eastern European airlines are probably the cheapest but are not always reliable! Middle Eastern airlines are often better and Emirates, Gulf and Royal Jordanian have been well recommended. Thai Airways are also very good. However, some of the cheaper flights only go as far as Delhi, which is fine if you are happy to then travel to Kolkata either overland- which is not advisable if this is your first time in India - or by air. Most people seem to come in on the BA flight.

Insurance

It is **essential for all volunteers** to take out an insurance policy to cover their trip. Read the small print to ensure that it provides all the necessary cover (particularly medical expenses and theft), and make sure you know what to do with it in case of an emergency. Also write down any relevant document number and leave a copy with a willing friend or relative and e-mail the details to yourself. CRK will also require a copy so that we can give assistance if needed.

The price of insurance varies considerably. In the same way as with your airfare, leave yourself time to shop around.

You should be aware that if you decide to return home for a holiday during your time in Kolkata, it might make your insurance invalid. If you are likely to be returning, check this out when you book your insurance. You should also check that you would be covered if you went to Thailand, Nepal or Bangladesh on holiday or to renew your visa if you are staying for more than 6 months. There are lots of policies available and the best way is to ring around as many companies as possible. Current volunteers have found good packages from, Sainsburys (UK), DKV in Germany and europ assistance in Belgium. Prices also vary a lot from \$ 200 to \$ 300, depending on the level of cover.

Immunisation

If possible, start planning immunisations with your GP up to six months in advance. While some vaccines do not provide total protection, you should make use of such protection as they do afford. The effective duration of immunisations varies so for up to date information check with your own doctor, a travel clinic or hospital for tropical diseases.

Recommendations made in 2005 (for India only) were:

Prophylaxis for Malaria

Proguanil (Paludrine) 100mg, 2 daily and Chloroquine (Nivaquine) 150mg, 2 weekly. Tablets should be taken in a single dose with or after food. Start taking **1 week** before arriving in India and continue taking for at least **4 weeks** after leaving an infected area. Other anti malarial drugs are available and you should check what are the most appropriate for you. Unfortunately, a recent study in India showed 30% of volunteers/tourists stop taking their prophylaxis on arrival. A medical expert on malaria in Kolkata, Dr Chatterjee, advises that volunteers should stick to the advice given to them by their own doctors.

Some types of malaria have become resistant to the tablets so CRK recommends that a mosquito net be used. This can be bought in India although they are very thick so when hot, can make you even hotter. Ex volunteers tend to recommend buying a good quality one in England. Mosquito repellent should be used to cover all exposed skin after dusk, the most effective repellent having a high DEET content (50% is recommended). It is wise to take a sufficient supply with you for your whole stay. Autan has recently been introduced to the Indian market, but may not always be available. Citronella, and Neem oil are widely available. Plug in mosquito repellents can also be bought in India. The use of mosquito nets and repellents will also help to prevent dengue fever, though there is no prophylactic medication. The dengue mosquito is most active in the morning and so you also need to wear repellent at this time of day as well. In fact wearing it all day is a good idea. Some volunteers have come to Kolkata and not been on any prophylaxis, instead they have bought drugs with them to use if they contract malaria. This is not recommended, as the p. falciparum strain which is active here could kill very quickly. You may also contact other strains, e.g. p.vivax, which can cause chronic malaria after the acute stage has resolved, and this can last for years. Prevention is better as there may be no cure.

Vaccines.

Most vaccines can be obtained from your doctor either free or at the cost of a normal or private prescription. However doctors may have their own policy and are allowed to charge the full price. Explain what you are doing and where you are going, try and insist on getting a prescription. Below are the recommended immunisations in 2005. Travel clinics are often more expensive than your doctor.

Meningitis: This is now on the increase strongly advise everyone to have the vaccine. You must ensure that it is for the type currently active in India. Make sure that you get the correct one for Kolkata.

Rabies: In India 80,000 deaths are reported annually from Rabies. Medical intervention must occur within 48 hours of the incident but this is not always possible, especially if you are away from Kolkata. The injections can be expensive but we advise you to think carefully about whether you want to proceed with this vaccination. This is a course of 3 injections, which must be spaced at 0, 7 and 28 days, so leave yourself sufficient time to fit this in.

Hepatitis A: This is a very common problem in India due to limited sanitation and contaminated water supply.

Hepatitis B: There are an estimated 50 million Hep B carriers in India. Because volunteers are working in a medical environment we advise all volunteers to find out their Hep B status and have a one off booster or a course of injections if you are not already covered.

Hepatitis C and D: At present there is no known vaccine but this is still relatively rare in India.

Tuberculosis: Current advice is that you do not need to have a mantoux test prior to leaving the UK. On your return to the UK if you have any signs or symptoms of TB, night sweats and pyrexia, cough, sputum, general unexplained weight loss, then you should go to your GP who will refer you to a chest physician. Most UK citizens have had a BCG vaccination at age 12-13 years of age. This lasts 15 years and is 70% effective. You can only have the BCG once. If you have not had it and are under 35 years old you can obtain it from a travel clinic.

Japanese Encephalitis: Only necessary if you are spending time in rural areas.

Typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria and polio: Check with your doctor that these are up to date and if not, you should have these vaccinations

In addition to what your doctor advises, Calcutta Rescue recommends vaccination against measles and mumps if the volunteer has not had these diseases before as they are much more widespread in India and Asia than in Western countries, due to lack of immunisation.

Money

Obviously the amount that you spend is up to you, and depends very much on the accommodation you choose. However, as a rough guide you can cover accommodation at one of the budget hotels, food, local transport, clothes, have the odd beer and more expensive meal and extras like toiletries, batteries, clothes for approximately Indian Rs.5000/- per week (May 2005 figure). If you want to join a gym, drink alcohol regularly or go away for occasional weekends, you may need more than this.

You may want to consider taking a combination of cash (avoid torn and soiled notes) and travellers cheques. You will not be able to buy Indian rupees in your home country so it is best to take your cash in American dollars. Credit cards are now much more widely accepted in India in the major cities at larger stores. ATMs are widely available in the major cities and many volunteers now prefer to use their bank debit card rather than taking large amounts of cash and travellers cheques. You will need to

keep receipts from ATM's until you leave as proof of exchange. There are plenty of places where travellers' cheques can be changed so its best to check around for rates and commission charged.

Mobile Phones

All the volunteers keep in touch with each other via mobile phones, mostly using text, as it is cheaper. If you use a UK mobile in India then make sure it is set up for roaming, however it will cost you a lot more. You can change the SIM card out here but ensure that it is ok with your mobile phone company. You can buy new phones very cheaply in Kolkata. To register for a new SIM in Kolkata you need copies of passport and visa, proof of UK and Kolkata address and a passport photo. It is worth the effort and the Hutch shop on Sudder Street is very helpful

Things to Take

Kolkata has a wide range of shops from markets to small roadside stalls and air-conditioned shopping centres where most things can be bought. Most of what may be considered essential is available in Kolkata and it is mostly common sense what you will need to bring. There are a number of new shopping centres in Kolkata that have all the things you would expect in a UK one. There are also lots of great bookshops, mobile phone shops and computer outlets. We also suggest the following things:

- Swimming costume- you cannot buy these easily and the designs are not great.
- Universal sink-plug
- Light sleeping bag if you plan to go trekking or if staying over winter - otherwise don't bother
- Sheet sleeping bag (can be useful, especially on train journeys)
- Lonely Planet guide to India is the best one.
- Mosquito repellent
- Mosquito net
- A basic medical kit - might include eye drops, plasters, antiseptic cream, bandage, antifungals (Canesten skin cream for example), Lomotil tablets, etc. These are sometimes but not always available locally, and are reassuring to have anyway. A bottle of Solyptol, Savlon, or other antiseptic is a comforting safeguard. You can buy many drugs over the counter here that would be prescription only in the UK.
- Any regular medication that you take
- Condoms – Indian condoms are often kept in unsafe conditions so are not reliable.
- Couple of padlocks - you need one for your door at cheap hotels - can get them there but not as secure and you will need it when you arrive.
- Lightweight chain (to secure luggage when travelling on trains)
- Sewing kit
- Swiss Army penknife often useful
- Earplugs - good for rail journeys/noisy hotels
- Suncream
- Lip balm
- Playing cards are often handy
- A diary can be very useful
- Money belt - for travelling
- Corkscrew is often a good idea
- Trekking sandals, TEVA are a good make, as they are useful in the potholed Kolkata streets and in the monsoon. Flip-flops will float away.

It is advisable to take your belongings in a rucksack as that will be much easier when going on holiday and travelling around India. A small backpack to carry things around in Kolkata is also useful.

3. ARRIVING IN KOLKATA

Kolkata is five and a half hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. You will be met by a volunteer already in Kolkata but below is some general advice about arrival.

By Air

If you are arriving by air at Kolkata's Dum Dum airport, first change some money at the bank in the International terminal (adjacent and to the left after leaving the arrivals' terminal). It is easiest to change an American dollar bill, although the exchange rate may not be very good, so use a small denomination. You have to fill in paperwork, show your passport and keep the "encashment certificate" they give you to show when you leave the country.

We will meet you at the airport but if for any reason you are coming into Kolkata alone then you will need to get a taxi. There are two pre-paid taxi booths; one in the International terminal and, if that one is closed, one in the Domestic terminal. As a guide, the fare to Sudder Street in May 2005 was Indian Rs.200/-. You should always use the pre-paid taxi booths if at all possible. However, if they are closed then you take a taxi from the taxi rank outside the airport, either insisting the driver uses the meter and/or clearly agreeing the fare before setting off. At this stage, it is useful to know that phonetic interpretation of the written English word can be slightly different in India. Hence Sudder Street may become Sudderi St, Park Street becomes Parki St, and so on. Taxi drivers usually have a male companion with them - this is not usually a threat but can be a little daunting for female passengers, if you don't feel comfortable, then use another taxi.

At Dum Dum airport there are a lot of people that try and help you with your bags when you come out of arrivals. Unless you want to give them money for doing so (which is difficult if you don't have small change in Indian currency) we suggest that volunteers do not accept their help. They can get a bit aggressive if they help you and then you do not pay them.

If you are arriving late at night, and are booking a hotel in advance for that night, make sure it has a night clerk on duty. Some volunteers book into the hotel at the airport for their first night in Kolkata. When you are tired, it is dark and the streets are quiet, getting into a taxi on your own and going somewhere unfamiliar is not a good idea. If you decide not to book a hotel, we suggest that you remain overnight in the airport and travel into the city once it is light.

By Train

If you are arriving by train be prepared for a lot of chaos at the station! Hold on to your luggage. The taxi ride from Howrah Station to Sudder Street can take between twenty minutes and one hour, depending on the traffic. There is a pre-paid taxi booth at Howrah station – follow the signs and pay at the booth. They will give you the registration number of the taxi although the taxi driver will probably find you anyway. If the pre-paid taxi booth is closed, make sure you agree the fare before taking a taxi. It should cost approximately Rs 60 / 70 to Sudder St. Taxis charge more if it is late at night or if it is raining. Alternatively there are buses to the Indian Museum (on the corner of Chowringhee Road and Sudder St). However, if you are new to Calcutta and carrying baggage, a taxi - if available – will be much easier. If you arrive in at Sealdah station then the journey will take about 20 minutes depending on the time of day.

4. IN KOLKATA

Accommodation

With accommodation you get more or less what you pay for, and the Lonely Planet guide gives a thorough description of what is available. Budget accommodation for tourists is mostly in the Sudder Street area, where rooms cost from 250 Rupees a night. There are also more expensive hotels ranging up to \$200 a night. Some volunteers now choose to stay in flats away from the city centre, and though this will involve travelling into the city it can mean a few more home comforts. Most volunteers choose to stay in budget accommodation for the first few nights and the Administrator or nurse co-ordinator can help to arrange this.

Additional Information (Updated Aug 2007)

In February 2007 there has been a new kind of accommodation found. As the 'Modern Lodge' until now was quite popular, now 'Calcutta Guest House' has really proven to be a very nice option and is even more cheaper than the Modern Lodge.

It is situated on 'Cowie Lane', which is a lane between Sudder Street and Lindsay Street. It is a two storey apartment complex above the 'tourist department' of 'Calcutta Guesthouse'. It contains approx. 13 rooms, which are of various sizes from small to large. Prices are starting from INR 4000 a room per month.

Mr. Parvez is the landlord and is also the owner of the 'Ashreen Hotel', which is situated just opposite the Calcutta Guesthouse. For these 13 rooms mentioned above, he prefers to accommodate people who are staying for a longer term.

For new volunteers who will arrive in future it is really worthwhile to consider this option!

They just have to go to the 'Ashreen Hotel' and ask if there is a room available and/or if they can have a look, but probably there will always be volunteers from CR already living there and which will be showing the new volunteer around. **Annie Duffill. Volunteer Nurse Coordinator.**

Getting your bearings

Tired after a long flight or train journey, your senses may be further tested upon initial exposure to Kolkata. Do allow two or three days to settle in, adjust to the pace of India and meet people. An orientation week will have been arranged but this is flexible and in the hot season you may need longer to do half days for a while.

Health

Anyone who suffers from a pulmonary illness should seriously consider **not** going to work in Kolkata because of the air pollution.

It is important to take good care of your health in India - don't compromise it! Stomach upsets are almost inevitable, but can often be avoided by drinking bottled water and eating sensibly at tried and "trusted" restaurants. By talking to other volunteers, you will soon find out where and what to eat and what not to eat.

- You should only drink bottled water, make sure the cap is sealed, or filtered if you are sure this has been done correctly. You need at least 3 litres a day and considerably more in the hot season. During this time (April to September) replacement salts (electrolyte) may be added to bottled drinking water to avoid salt loss and heat fatigue. The replacement salts can be bought at any pharmacy.
- Avoid salads unless you are sure how they have been washed.

- You should wash all fruit, salad and vegetables before eating.
- Prawns, fish and meat are sometimes of dubious quality.
- Don't walk barefoot but wear flip-flops/thongs in your hotel room and in the shower.
- Apply first aid to any cuts, grazes, etc. as soon as possible.

As with any tropical country, serious health problems can usually be avoided by living sensibly. The Administrator has contact numbers for doctors and dentists if you become seriously ill / concerned by any ailment.

Take your malaria prophylaxis right throughout your stay, and for the required time afterwards, and use your mosquito net and insect repellent.

Food and Drink

The budget guesthouses do not have cooking facilities so staying in one will mean eating out the majority of the time. Places to eat are many and varied, including Chinese and "Western" as well as Indian. Volunteers will point out the current best places and their 'favourites'. Fruit is on sale everywhere and is very cheap - if you like mangoes it is paradise in the right season! Curd Corner sells curd, which is popularly held to be good for wobbly tummies. Park Street, not far from Sudder Street, has some more expensive restaurants serving good food – worth an occasional visit if your budget can stretch to it.

Bottled mineral water is widely available and costs about Rs10/- for a litre bottle. Other soft drinks are also readily available.

Entertainment

Kolkata does not have a particularly 'busy' nightlife. There are bars, but these tend to be in four /five Star Hotels. There are a number of off licences/ bottle shops in the tourist areas. There are two or three nightclubs – again in the better hotels. Volunteers will be able to tell you which is the current favourite.

Sunday lunch at the Oberoi is a pleasant luxury, and if you are in Kolkata in the hot season then go to the Hotel Hindustan on Sundays, when you can swim all day for approximately R300/-. (Take your own lunch, and your own bottled water to drink as the beer is overpriced.)

Kingfisher or Black Label Beer is fine. Mixed drinks are usually served lukewarm - don't accept ice!!

Calcutta has a range of venues for concerts (typically Indian Classical) plus a number of air conditioned cinemas, which are cheap and show the latest 'Bollywood' films and films that have been on general release in Europe two or three months previously.

From the tourist point of view it is worth seeing the Kali Temple - ***but do not try to photograph the ceremony there or in other temples.*** Also worth a visit are the Marble Palace (they will ask for a tourist pass, but will accept a R10/- note in lieu), the Victoria Memorial, the Jain temple, St John's churchyard, Park Street Cemetery, and the Black Hole Memorial. The Botanic Gardens are worth a visit if only to see the biggest banyan tree in the world and the ferry trip on the Hooghly is interesting. It is always best to go sightseeing in a group or with a companion.

Sexual harassment (groping, pinching) is unfortunately common for women in crowded situations and also when shopping or on buses or trains at peak hour. Most buses and the metro will have seats

reserved for women, often at the front, and wearing appropriate clothing may help to reduce the incidence.

Clothing

Cotton clothes are best. A light jumper can be useful for winter evenings. Local tailors can make clothes inexpensively. Flip-flops are very useful but these can be bought cheaply in Calcutta.

Don't bring too much with you, as almost everyone cannot resist buying once they arrive in Calcutta! Women often choose to wear salwar suits (trousers with long dress over), as these are comfortable in the heat and cheap.

Local Transport

Local transport is very cheap and very chaotic. Buses, both privately and state operated, are invariably full to overflowing, but have a good network. Trams are excruciatingly slow. Kolkata also has a limited underground railway system - a great way of getting from North to South in Kolkata and used by volunteers to get to and from the clinics and other places. It's cheap, much quicker than travelling on the roads and pretty reliable.

If you are on a tight budget, taxis may not be for everyday use, but are probably the most comfortable way of getting around. When arranging a taxi, make sure the meter is used – although taxi drivers will try very hard to refuse to use it! The driver should have a fare chart - but some volunteers find that no taxi they get into ever has a chart!

Central Kolkata is one of the last outposts of the hand pulled rickshaw, while cycle rickshaws are common elsewhere. Again, if you use them, agree a price with the rickshaw puller in advance. (Some people have moral objections to using hand pulled rickshaws, while others feel that in not doing so, they may be depriving the willing rickshaw puller of some income.)

Post and Telephone

Volunteers can receive mail in their hotel or flat though it can take a few weeks to arrive. If you are sent a parcel, then the postman will (usually!) leave a note at your accommodation and you have to go the Post Office at Park St to collect it. Sometimes parcels get lost or tampered with so please advise friends and family not to send very valuable items. It is better to use DHL or another courier company to deliver more expensive/valuable items (such as replacement Visa Cards!).

For emergencies you can give the Office Phone Number (00 91 33 2217 5675)

You should not give friends and family the Kolkata Rescue P.O. Box address, as it is only accessible to Dr Preger who collects the post usually once a week if he is in Kolkata. Any mail which does come there will be passed on when Dr. Jack is next in the office.

It is possible to make direct dialled international phone calls and send faxes from various locations on Sudder St and elsewhere.

Internet cafes are everywhere around Sudder Street. Email is probably the quickest and most reliable method of communication - and costs around R.40/- an hour. Some places have special deals such as a certain number of hours for a fixed price. You may want to set up a roaming e-mail address before you leave and also check with your mobile phone company re the cost of calls.

5. VOLUNTEERING WITH CALCUTTA RESCUE

Starting work

We advise you to take 2 or 3 days to acclimatise when you arrive in Calcutta. After arriving you will need to attend a briefing in the office, usually with the Administrator, before starting work in the clinics/schools.

Working hours

Calcutta Rescue clinics and schools are open 6 days a week (Monday to Saturday), excluding statutory holidays. Barring illness volunteers work **five** days a week, choosing which day they want to have off. There is time after clinics/schools close for volunteers to do administration and computer work and attend meetings. This is expected, particularly of recruited volunteers.

Volunteers are entitled to 2 weeks holiday for every 3 months worked, timing to be agreed with the Administrator and Nurse Coordinator. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to take this time off and have a break from the work and Kolkata.

Dress and different nationalities

It is important to wear appropriate dress at the clinics to show respect for the local staff and patients and to avoid misunderstandings. Therefore in the interests of cultural sensitivity, we maintain the following dress code:

- Women should keep their knees and shoulders covered. They should not wear shorts, short skirts or lungis worn above the knee, sleeveless or low-cut tops, leggings and so on;
- Men should not wear shorts or sleeveless tops.

Volunteers need to be aware that because we come from a different culture and country, our mentality and behaviour will at times be different from the local staff. We ask you to be sensitive and tolerant about this and avoid judging. This will hopefully lead to mutual respect between us all and enable us to work well together in meeting the needs of the patients.

In addition, please remember that there are volunteers of several different nationalities working with CR, therefore the first language of some of them is not English. Please make allowances for this.

Visiting other projects

CR volunteers are welcome to visit the other projects in Kolkata. However, the sensitivity of some of the areas means that prior permission to visit the clinic/project should be obtained from the Administrator or Nurse Co-ordinator

The No. 10 school is in a very sensitive and volatile area. Volunteers are welcome to visit, but **MUST** make an arrangement to do so through the Administrator or Nurse Co-ordinator - not the School Nurse or any of the staff members at the school. Please do **NOT** take photographs, either around the school, from its roof, or in the area away from the main road. Go directly to the school and straight back. Do not wander around or visit local chai stalls.

Chitpur is also a sensitive area. Again, please check with the Administrator or Nurse Co-ordinator to arrange a visit.

Discretion

Please be careful about talking openly about the organisation, as there have been problems in the past. This applies when you are in restaurants and cafes. Although Calcutta Rescue is a registered society, it is not fully established. Many people come to visit the clinics, including journalists, photographers, etc. Damage can, and has been done - although inadvertently - with careless remarks. For this reason, ***if a journalist approaches you, you must refer them to the Administrator immediately and should not even try to answer their questions.*** The Administrator and Management Committee need to deal with all journalists. You should also inform the Administrator if anyone visits your project without prior arrangement having been agreed.

Handicrafts

A selection of handicrafts is available for sale to volunteers and visitors.

6. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT CALCUTTA

Brief History

Calcutta, now known as Kolkata, is sometimes referred to as a British invention. It was founded by Job Charnock as a base for the East India Company in the late seventeenth century. It prospered politically and commercially throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but its status as capital of India under the British Raj was lost in 1911, when Delhi became the new capital.

Kolkata was the site of serious communal riots in 1946 during which many thousands were killed and which ended only after a hunger strike there by Mahatma Gandhi. Its proximity to Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) has political significance. It was the focus for many refugees during India's independence and partition in 1947, and again during Bangladesh's war of independence in 1970/1.

Climate

November to February - sunny and pleasant with virtually no rain, average daily temperature in the low to mid 20'sC.

March to May - becoming increasingly hot and humid with May temperatures often over 35C and humidity frequently between 90% and 100%.

June to September/October - the SW monsoon breaks in June, initially providing welcome relief from the heat and humidity. Heavy and sometimes prolonged rain showers alternate with bright sunny spells - at ground level this equates to flooding alternating with evaporation. This can mean walking through flooded streets and is when the rickshaws do their most business.

Geography

Situated just south of the Tropic of Cancer, Kolkata is the capital of West Bengal and the largest city in India. It lies on the Hooghly River, the last major tributary in India of the Ganges. To the west of the Hooghly is Howrah, one of the most densely populated areas on earth. Kolkata is about eighty miles north of the Bay of Bengal, and some sixty miles west of the Bangladesh border, and has an estimated

population in excess of 13 million. Bengali is the main language, but English and Hindi are widely spoken. Its very apparent poverty in various forms has given rise to the city's occasional synonymy with urban deprivation.

Religion

Kolkata is a cosmopolitan city and this is reflected in its population's religious affiliations. Hinduism is the main religion, with the Kali Temple a major pilgrimage site. There is also a significant Chinese and Muslim population and many patients are Muslim. The office is located in a predominantly Muslim area. Around the city you can see numerous mosques, churches and other religious buildings.

Economy

Kolkata's historical role as India's economically most important city has diminished in recent years, and today it ranks behind Mumbai and Delhi in this respect. Nonetheless, it retains significance as an industrial port and a commercial centre.

Refugees

There was a huge influx of mainly Hindu refugees from eastern Bengal at partition. The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 heralded further mass migration to Kolkata. The flow of migrants to Kolkata has continued since and has been augmented by other economic refugees from Kolkata's rural hinterland and beyond. This has increased the city's "informal sector" workforce and, with respect to those from Bangladesh, has given rise to a politically sensitive situation between India and Bangladesh.

We hope that this Fact Sheet has answered some of your questions. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us if you require any further information.

If you notice during the course of your preparations to go to Kolkata that any of this information is out of date, please let us know so that we can keep the details as accurate as possible. Thank you.

Have a safe trip and an excellent time in Kolkata.

Thank you again for giving your time and energy to volunteer with Calcutta Rescue.