

Dear Nanda

We thank you for the opportunity you gave us to teach English here in Sri Lanka. We learned a lot about the country and its people. We were astonished how greatly we had been welcomed in the village, especially in Segars house and how keen the children were to learn new things. Without knowing English and the western culture, Segars parents had been amazing hosts. Even though our stay had many positive aspects, we decided to leave earlier than planned, as the work was much more challenging and time consuming than described on workaway.info. We think that the Horizon Lanka Academy has a very good aim, but we also think that some points need to be improved for the next volunteers. Below we listed some points that may be improved.

Before arrival

The communication before our arrival was very short, but as you referenced on your informative website, it was ok for us. The website has information about almost everything. As the website is only for the village Mahawilachchiya it was obvious for us that we will teach in Mahawilachchiya itself.

Our recommendation: As most of the volunteers do not teach in the village itself, it should be made clear on the website that the academy is spread over whole Sri Lanka and many new branches are opening right now. The volunteers need to know, that the meeting point may not be in Mahawilachchiya.

Arrival

From Colombo we had a six hour bus drive to Anuradhapura, just to be informed that we could teach in Nanu Oya which was another six hour bus drive back to the south. We could have gone there directly from Colombo with comfortable two hours in the train.

Our recommendation: Plan and discuss already in advance where the volunteers should go and save a lot of time and energy of the volunteers. This time and energy should better be used for the work with the children.

New guest families

The culture of Sri Lanka and of the one from the western people is very different and we were happy to receive the code of ethics in advance. These rules are very good and very important. Unfortunately we had to learn that our guest family never received these rules. Also you told us that the family has no western toilet but you never mentioned that the family has no shower and the washing happens outside the house. Even though we had been very surprised, it was no problem for us as we are used to this kind of washing trough our camping experiences.

Our recommendation: The code of ethics should be a high priority to new guest families and you should not just send it to them, but furthermore discuss it with them and make sure everything is well understood. We think it must also be clearly communicated how the situation with toilet and non existing bathroom is, as we are sure many volunteers will have some trouble with it.

Opening a new branch

Organisation

When we arrived in Nanu Oya, the first day we had to visit the regional education director, the vize regional education director and as well the headmasters of the schools to explain them the organisation Horizon Lanka and what we are going to teach. We felt that neither the local administrator nor the school directors had been informed how Horizon Lanka works and what the volunteers are here for. We would have loved to know for ourselves what our tasks here would be.

Our recommendation: If opening a new branch, make sure that all people involved know what the academy is about and what the volunteers are capable of and what not.

Working hours

On our arrival we had been asked to work five hours in the morning in four different public schools, four hours in the afternoon for the academy and the evening to improve the English of Segar. Also we had been asked to work on Saturday the whole day. The next day we discussed it again and lowered the working hours. But it was difficult for us to arrive and first have to say “no” to everything.

Our recommendation: Offer the volunteers the minimum amount of working hours and give them the possibility to teach more hours if they want. This gives them the chance to grow slowly in their work. Also we think it is much better if the volunteer work in the beginning just in one school to get to know the teachers, students and rules of the schools. More schools could be added, if the volunteer feels comfortable.

English Teaching Public School

From beginning it was expected of us to teach the classes without the help of a local English teacher. We explained clearly that this is not possible for us, as we didn't know the level of the children nor how the school here works. Beside an English book (which did not fit to the level of the children), no teaching material was present. In the end, the English teacher did not show up the whole morning. Laura as an experienced teacher was able to teach the classes without school material for a whole morning. But it was extremely stressful for her. For volunteers without many years of teaching experience this would have been just impossible.

Our recommendation: As everyone can teach for Horizon Lanka Academy many inexperienced volunteers will come. We think teaching for them is just possible if they get the support of an experienced teacher, very small groups of children or at least good teaching material. If no English teacher and no material is available, the volunteers have to know this in advance so they can prepare themselves properly for the lessons.

English Teaching Academy Afternoon

In the afternoon twenty very motivated children had been there. We decided to teach English as the school headmaster clearly expressed that he would prefer us to teach English than dancing lessons. As we did not have any teaching material, we also needed to prepare the lessons for the afternoon which was very time consuming.

Our recommendation: If no teaching material is available, the volunteers have to know this in advance so they can prepare themselves properly for the lesson. It would be a good idea

for the Horizon Lanka Academy to provide some material to the volunteers including for example ideas for games and songs.

IT Teaching

When we arrived in Nanu Oya we learned that no computers are available for the children and that I also should teach English. One school had computers but they were reserved for the teachers.

Our recommendation: If someone is sent to teach IT, make sure that some IT infrastructure is available.

If some of our mentioned recommendations could be put into practice, we are sure, that it could be an amazing experience for all involved parties. Thank you again for the great experience and all the best for the future!