

General Questions

I'm coming to Nepal from abroad; what do I need to do before arriving?

Health: Contact your local travel clinic for information on vaccinations and medicine you might need for travelling in Nepal.

Visas: Different visas are required for people from different countries and also depend on what kind of volunteering or research you intend to carry out. Please see the Nepalese Consulate website for your home country for details. Obtain a visa for Nepal before you leave your country of origin if you can. Otherwise you can get one at the airport on arrival; have passport-sized photos with you. If you plan to travel to India as part of your visit, get your Indian visa before leaving, if appropriate - it's a more complicated process in Nepal.

Visas are available for 15, 30 and 90 days costing £20, £35 and £75 respectively. You can get up to 60 days upon arrival at the airport (payable in foreign currency). Check the Nepalese Embassy websites for up-to-date information. Visa extensions are easily available in KTM for periods of 30 days for \$1 a day (payable in rupees). You can stay up to 120 days in a calendar year, with another 30 days upon 'special approval'. HPC can provide a letter for this or you can show an onward ticket. You would need a tourist visa, as the small-scale nature of the programmes means HPC does not have the status required to obtain non-tourist visas. However, you may be able to arrange this via an institution in your own country, for example Fulbright Scholarships, or certain Universities that run programmes in Nepal. HPC would be able to provide you with a letter of support to help with this.

Money: Visa and Mastercard are accepted by most ATMs. You may also bring your home country's currency to be exchanged once you arrive. Travellers' checks are accepted by most banks, check with your bank for more details.

What should I bring?

Make sure you bring loose-fitting, comfortable clothing appropriate for farming. You may want to buy traditional Nepali clothes when you arrive in the country, since they are suitable for the climate, the culture, and the type of work you will be doing. For women, a simple salwar kameez (baggy trousers and a long, loose-fitting tunic) is perfect. Men can wear shorts and t-shirts. Bring a sarong or bed sheet to use as a cover whilst washing – washing facilities can be exposed.

Sturdy boots may be useful for travelling to resource centres and demonstration farms in remote regions such as Surkhet and Humla, but are not necessary for farm work.

Commercial toiletries available abroad can be purchased in Nepal. Feminine hygiene products are available but you may wish to bring familiar products from home e.g. a mooncup/diva cup. Please try to use natural, biodegradable products where possible. There is also the option of using unprocessed natural products such as raw oils, ayurvedic soaps, and medicinal herbs to meet your needs.

Other things you might want to bring include a first aid kit, torch and/or candles, sleeping bag and/or liner, raincoat, hat, flip flops, water purifying tablets and a sturdy water bottle, a Nepali phrase book, toilet paper (?), and a mosquito net for if you are going to the low-lying areas of the Terai, and small change for use in remote places.

What should I do when I first arrive in Nepal?

If you arrive in Nepal by air you can get a taxi from the airport to Sunrise Farm, the resource centre and demonstration farm just outside Kathmandu. (When getting a taxi, you might want to give the driver Sunrise Farm's phone number – 4272167 – and someone at the farm will give directions.) Here, you will be able to volunteer and make arrangements to visit other farms in the HPC network. Shyam Shrestha will give you all the information you need to get to HPC village sites in Surkhet district, and link you to other projects that accept visitors (such as through the Nepal Permaculture Group).

If you enter Nepal over land, it's a good idea to head straight to Sunrise Farm before visiting other resource centres.

How do I get to HPC resource centres?

To get to Sunrise Farm, the resource centre in Kathmandu, just get a taxi. It may help to give the taxi driver Sunrise Farm's phone number, so that someone at the farm can give directions. You can also walk to the farm, visiting Durbar Square and Swayambadu (the monkey temple) en route.

Shyam, the Manager at Sunrise Farm, will then be able to put you directly in touch with HPC in Surkhet, and tell you how to get there if you don't already know.

Information for volunteers

Are volunteers required to have previous farming experience?

No previous farming experience is necessary but willingness to learn is a must.

What kind of work will I be expected to do whilst volunteering with HPC?

Volunteers are encouraged to play a part in the running of HPC resource centre, which is a working farm set up to demonstrate, train and resource sustainable agriculture development programmes. This will give volunteers a taste of traditional village life – caring for livestock, grain crops, and the general running of the household. In addition, they will get direct experience in the introduction of improved technologies alongside traditional ones. This may be beekeeping, weaving, fruit tree production, kitchen gardening, tree planting, and a plethora of other activities that HPC is involved in. Finally, there are frequent cultural activities such as song, dance, and festivals to observe and enjoy. These are as much a part of the HPC's work as the planting of trees, and equally important when working with holistic systems.

Volunteers are expected to work 6 hours a day, depending on the amount of work available.

What is daily life like whilst volunteering with HPC?

The working day begins early, to avoid the midday heat and take advantage of daylight. Livestock are let out, fodder and firewood is collected, and breakfast made from 6:00/6:30. The rest of the day is filled with seasonal tasks listed above, interspersed with lunch (at around midday) and dinner (at about 7:00). Bedtime comes early in rural Nepal, since the daily rhythm follows the path of the sun.

Do volunteers get days off?

Volunteers are welcome to take time off to rest or explore the surrounding areas, but are requested to inform Centre members and/or their host family a day in advance.

May I volunteer at the farm if I am unable to do physical labor?

Yes, you will never be required to do work you are not comfortable with (for example carrying heavy loads if you have a back problem). There are many tasks and opportunities for learning that do not require physical labor. Illustration and design of newsletters, technical bulletins, the website, and information packages for use by farmers are areas in which volunteers skilled in information search, cataloguing data, illustration, graphics, desk top publishing and internet may be able to contribute.

What kind of food is served whilst volunteering with HPC?

All meals are vegetarian and consist primarily of seasonal organic fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes grown by host families or in the local area. Food is served three times a day. Big/snack eaters may like to bring snacky stuff - muesli, nuts, dried fruit, etc.

Vegans may have a hard time in Nepal since milk, yogurt, and ghee (clarified butter) are present at almost every meal. However, host families will try to accommodate everyone's needs.

What are the facilities available to volunteers?

Volunteers will stay with host families – members of HPC. These families will provide volunteers with accommodation and food in exchange for help on their own land, as well as on HPC programmes and the daily fee of NRS350.

Accommodation is basic; expect outdoor toilets and limited bathroom facilities. It is essential for females to bring along a sarong or something similar to cover up whilst washing.

Is the water safe?

The safety of drinking water varies depending on where you are staying, but host families will always provide boiled water for volunteers if needed/on request.

Is there mobile phone service at the resource centres?

There is mobile phone service at both the Kathmandu and Surkhet resource centres, but not in Humla (but it is planned).

Does the farm have internet service?

The resource centre in Kathmandu has internet service, but other resource centres and host families do not have access to the internet though it is planned – check for updates.

What languages are used at resource centres?

Nepali is the most commonly used language. English is spoken by some Centre

members and host families, but it is useful to have some grounding in Nepali before venturing out of Kathmandu.

Centre members and host families will be happy to help volunteers with their Nepali, and enjoy learning English. For volunteers staying for extended periods of time, language instruction can cost \$100-200 per month.

Is there a minimum amount of time I can volunteer with HPC?

A minimum of 2-3 weeks in the field is recommended, so with travel, orientation, etc. at least 4 weeks is best allowed for a fulfilling time. Any time in addition to this is a bonus both to you and the programmes.

Is there a maximum number of volunteers HPC can accommodate?

For the moment, the HPC can't handle more than 3 volunteers at a time, on one project. This is firstly for administrative and logistical reasons (i.e. beyond present capacity), but also because the impact of greater number of foreigners in these areas, however well-meaning, which are not regular tourist routes or otherwise frequented by many non-local visitors, has not yet been assessed. Such an assessment will be on going, and any increase in numbers would be gradual and appropriate with the response of the villagers.

How much will it cost to volunteer with HPC?

Food and accommodation: HPC asks for NRs 350 per day. At the current exchange rates, this is about \$5 or £3. This covers accommodation and food costs whilst staying with a host family, and part of the money is used to support NPC's programmes.

Donations: If you have funding connections, we can provide you with project details and budgets of programmes requiring support. This may include projects which you are particularly interested to work with, or even start. Visitors who are coming merely to visit/study the programme will be charged NRs400 per day.

We are always interested in receiving fruit and vegetable seeds, relevant books, magazines, posters, etc, and technical information. HPC is going through a capacity building stage at present, and is looking to build its communications infrastructure in particular. For this we are looking for: second-hand laptops (in reasonable condition), solar panels, a printer, a digital camera, and a digital projector.

Travel costs: Flights from KTM to Nepalganj, \$150; bus \$15. Bus to Surkhet \$15. Unless you fly, costs to visit other programmes in Nepal by bus can range from \$2 to \$15. Flights range from \$80-160 (one way). Travel to India ranges from \$10-20 (bus/train) and \$100-\$250 (plane).

One more thing...

At all sites, you're free to join in with whatever work is going on. Staff may be loathe to show you what work needs doing, but don't be afraid to insist...join in!

Information for researchers

What kinds of research can NPC support?

Self-directed social science research that requires no supervision is possible at NPC's resource centres and demonstration farms.

Previous research – biodiversity programme: A British anthropologist working in Jajarkot in 1994 studied non-timber forest products (NTFPs - fibres, medicines, food plants, etc). He catalogued in detail plant species, their habitats, uses, and the extent to which they are exploited - are they locally consumed, traded with other villages, or exported to India for processing. In the case of the latter, where do they go, in what quantities, and how are they processed. The objectives of his research include direct application to the HPC's development work. Are the NTFPs over exploited i.e. in need of conservation? Can they be grown in farmers' fields? If so, the HPC looks to use them in farm diversification projects - or do they require undisturbed forest habitat? With the latter, habitat conservation is the only way of "managing" the NTFP, also giving the forest an economic value and thus ensuring its conservation. This study is on going, and many applications are yet to be explored. One application has been in the establishment of a clinic for women's reproductive health problems (which also provides general health services) at HPC's new Resource Centre in Baragaun, Neta VDC, Surkhet. Here, herbal medicines are being used and further researched for local production and use.

Other present research involves input-output analysis of agroforestry and farm diversification systems and other forms of low external input and sustainable agriculture, such as SRI comparing them with both traditional and high external input systems. This would look at energy, time, social, economic and ecological parameters

What kinds of resources are available to social science researchers staying at NPC's resource centres and demonstration farms?

HPC members are experienced seed keepers and organic farmers, and community organisers. Some members have experience in women's rights and healthcare. They are happy to work with researchers.

The resource centres and demonstration farms are places where members of NPC's national network of organic farmers periodically come together to see demonstrations of different farming techniques training and education programmes, and to share and access resources. In addition, researchers who would like to conduct interviews, are welcome to arrange field visits to the projects around Nepal.

Will an HPC staff member be able to act as my translator during visits to project sites?

No, researchers must hire their own translators. Research assistants (who may also be able to act as translators/language instructors) can also be arranged, who may charge anywhere between \$150-\$300 per month, plus travel and food.

Who should I contact for more information about conducting research through HPC?

Please use the "contact us" form on the website.