

Volunteer Information Pack



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Please think of the trees and don't print me!



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WHO ARE PROJECT BORNEO?

Project Borneo is a Malaysian conservation organisation and UK-based charity, and is a development of Project Orangutan (established in 2006). Founder and CEO Leo Biddle has over 20 years' experience working in the conservation sector in the developing world and is one of the pioneers of truly ethical wildlife tourism. Originally the orangutan themselves were our sole focus, but as we encountered more amazing wildlife in need of our help and built relationships with the extraordinary people here, we realised that we could be doing so much more...

And so Project Borneo was born! Of course the plight of the orangutan remains of paramount importance, but now we also care for a whole spectrum of endangered species indigenous to Borneo at the Matang Wildlife Centre. As well as working in the field, we continuously strive to create new, innovative projects and sustainable solutions to some of the problems faced by animals and ecosystems in Borneo.



WHO ARE PROJECT BORNEO?



Matang Wildlife Centre

The Centre opened in 1997, in the Malaysian state of Sarawak, Borneo. It is unique among orangutan rehabilitation centres in being a rescue centre for all protected wildlife, as well as the majestic primates themselves, and aims to rehabilitate and release any animal where possible. This is a very ambitious mandate, and Project Borneo has committed to helping this centre for the foreseeable future.

Centre management

Whilst much of our conservation work is based at Matang, the centre is actually managed by Sarawak Forestry Commission (SFC), with whom we enjoy a very close and effective working relationship. Ultimately, all decisions relating to the animals or enclosures must be approved by the Park Warden, an employee of SFC. At times this can be a lengthy process, especially if the Warden needs to communicate with the SFC's central office in Kuching before any decision is made.

Volunteers sometimes find it strange that it is not easier for us to make decisions about the animals at Matang, or to build new areas that we deem necessary. However, Matang is not our centre, nor do we manage it; it belongs to the government of Sarawak. We have worked hard over the years to ensure we are a trusted partner of SFC and the government, and any advice we give or proposals we submit are taken seriously.

The challenges we face

All animal sanctuaries face challenges, and these are often amplified in the developing world. For example, access to things like medical supplies and quality building materials can be very tough, and the facilities, conditions and standards of care are often far from ideal.

In addition, despite the 'good news' stories of releases which the international media focuses on, not all rescued animals will ever be fit to be released. The vast majority have been confiscated or surrendered from the illicit pet trade, meaning that they may have suffered months or years of inadequate diet, and may have no understanding of their own natural habitat. Many will require a lifetime of care.

Even for the percentage of animals that may be considered for release, simply leaving them in the forest is not enough to consider the job a success. Where scientists have tracked ex-captive animals after release back to wild, they have reported close to 100% mortality over a 12 month period, in a variety of species. Where release is possible, it is important to do so responsibly, and track the animal to make sure of a successful re-introduction.

These issues and plenty more besides are all compounded by one aggravating factor: a lack of sufficient funding. This means that despite the fact our staff are up-to-date on the best captive management, enrichment and husbandry techniques, it is not always straightforward to implement what we know.

THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

The hugely successful volunteer programme at Matang was set up by Project Borneo founder Leo, and is now in its 14th year.

We assist with providing food, building infrastructure, releasing animals, commissioning research and providing expert consultation - as well as helping with the day-to-day running of the centre. The volunteers play a key role here, and over the years we have contributed significantly to major improvements in animal welfare and infrastructure at the site.



THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

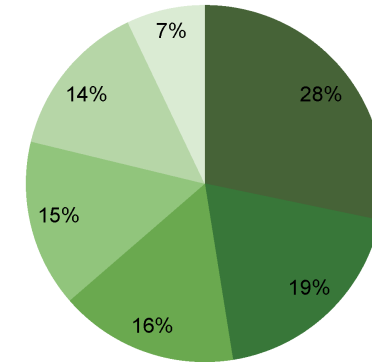


Why pay to volunteer?

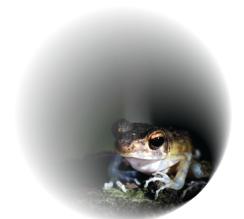
Running a wildlife sanctuary/rehabilitation centre is incredibly expensive. Food alone for the 200+ animals at Matang costs more than 1,500GBP each month. In addition, whilst an ethical volunteer project offers huge benefits to the animals at the centre it also creates significant financial outgoings. There is a cost to hosting each volunteer in the form of accommodation, welcome dinners and transport, and extra materials and tools must be purchased so that volunteers can complete meaningful projects.

The fee that volunteers pay compensates for all the expenses incurred by running a volunteer programme and also includes an outright donation to the charity. This allows us to not just maintain the status quo but make significant and sustainable improvements to the welfare of the animals at the centre. Project Borneo is a financially transparent company, and will happily share publicly any and all financial records, so that our paying volunteers can be sure their money is used on the ground for the benefit of the animals. Whilst of course our local staff are paid, our international staff are all long-term volunteers who receive a small stipend to live on, but do not receive a salary. We do not take any percentage of volunteer fees for administrative purposes; all Project Borneo marketing and admin is done by our tiny team for free so that the money we raise goes straight to the animals that need it.

Project Borneo expenditure at Matang Wildlife Centre 2017:



- Animal care: food, enrichment, veterinary care
- Contribution to SFC - mostly spent on animal feed
- Cost of volunteers: accommodation, meals, transport etc
- Husbandry costs, animal caregiver wages
- New enclosures and centre maintenance
- Release and rehabilitation



THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME



The programme itinerary

Location: Matang Wildlife Centre, Sarawak
Departs: 05th and 19th of every month
Price: £1280 (14 days); £1865 (28 days)
Duration: 14 or 28 days

Included: All essential food and drink, accommodation, airport transfers, contribution to animal welfare and conservation work
Not Included: Flights, travel insurance

Day 1
Arrive in Kuching

We collect you at the airport and transfer you to Basaga Residence (one of our fundraising businesses) to meet Project Borneo staff and your fellow volunteers for a welcome dinner and briefing. Make the most of the hot shower, air conditioning and swimming pool before departing to more rustic accommodation!

Day 2
Move to Matang

You will settle into your jungle lodge before being taken on a tour of the park to meet the animals, including the resident orangutan. Your day will finish with a trip to the shops for groceries, local SIM cards and anything else you may need for your time at the centre - there are no shops in the park.

Day 3-13 / 3-27
Make a difference!

This is where you get stuck in to real welfare work! You will be carrying out a variety of tasks including husbandry, construction work, enrichment, maintenance and farming. These will not always be glamorous, but they are all essential to maintain and improve our standards of care for these animals.

Day 14 / 28
Return to Basaga

The last day of the trip sees you enjoy your final night with the group back in the comfort of Basaga Residence, and includes a well-earned leaving dinner!

Day 15 / 29
Travel Onwards

We will transfer you to the airport for your flight home - or why not see what else spectacular Sarawak has to offer?

WHAT TO EXPECT



Many volunteers are initially quite upset that so many animals at Matang are in cages. However, please remember that none of us at Project Borneo like to see wild animals in cages either. We will not defend the conditions as we know many of them are far from ideal, however we will engage in a conversation so that you can learn about the broader issues and what we are doing to help. You should remember that:

- We are here to make a difference. The reason you join us is to contribute towards the ongoing improvement of conditions for all the animals in the future.
- You can always ask questions. There are explanations as to why each individual animal has ended up at the centre, and is in its current housing. These can be complex and varied, but your time volunteering with will be a very authentic experience; we will not shield you from the issues facing both conservationists and animal keepers in the developing world. Unfortunately, there is not a simple solution available for many of the animals that find themselves in centres like Matang, but we have committed to Matang in the hope of making many improvements over time.
- It is not always possible to improve the conditions for one individual animal or group of animals during the time you spend on the project. However we are constantly working on developments that improve the lives of the animals and every volunteer adds value and helps us achieve great outcomes. None of us can revolutionise conservation for vulnerable animals overnight; a massive societal change is needed if that is going to happen. This said, by partaking in an ethical volunteer project you are part of that positive evolution!



WHAT TO EXPECT



Your daily routine

Anyone over the age of 18 is welcome to join us, and the maximum group size is 16 between May and August, 12 for the rest of the year. Dry season is approximately April to September, so this tends to be the time of the year when we pull out all the stops and focus on the larger construction and maintenance projects. However, there is always 'rainy day' work to be done; enrichment and night den redesign for example make great rainy day activities and profoundly improve the welfare of the animals at the centre.

You do not need any specific skills or experience to be a fantastic volunteer - although if you are a builder/ carpenter/ welder/ mechanic etc we will try and make use of your talents where we can! This said, we have many years of experience creating programs and jobs that people from all backgrounds can participate in. We generally create jobs and projects that anyone with a reasonable fitness level can help us with - though please be aware that most tasks will be physically demanding, and always outdoors in the equatorial heat and humidity.

When you are with us, you are treated as temporary members of staff. We expect you to participate in any and all jobs that are required. We do not save the 'best' or 'worst' jobs for volunteers. We will distribute your labour to areas in need of attention at the time you are with us, as we would with any member of staff. By the same token, if we happen to be undertaking any surgeries, animal relocations or animal releases then we happily allow volunteers to watch from a safe distance.

Work hours are 08:15-12:00 and 14:00-17:00 each day.

There are four main areas in which volunteers are expected to work:

Husbandry: cleaning, feeding and caring for captive animals. Typically your day will begin with this at 08:15 before you go on to one of the other three types of work in the afternoon.

Each morning, whilst the animals are still safely shut inside their night houses, you will go into their enclosures and hide their food. This can be a really fun activity as it requires channelling your inner orangutan, monkey or bear and hiding food in hard to reach places. Encouraging the animals to engage in natural foraging behaviours keeps them mentally and physically stimulated which is critically important for the welfare of captive animals. The humans then leave the enclosure and staff members will let the animals in. This is a great time to try and capture that perfect photograph from the viewing platform!

After observing the animals foraging for their food it's time to face the poo which inevitably awaits in their night houses. Volunteers assist staff to hose and scrub these areas so that they are clean and ready for the animals to come back in to when they choose to do so.

Maintenance: The rainforest is a harsh environment for any man-made structures. Therefore, anything that we build needs regular maintenance to ensure that it does not rust/rot/get eaten by termites within a couple of years. This usually means a lot of cleaning, painting and repairing.



WHAT TO EXPECT



Enrichment: the process of providing captive animals with stimulating environments that encourage naturalistic behaviours. Without a stimulating environment, animals can become incredibly stressed, bored and sick as a consequence. Therefore, this is one of the most important jobs that you will have at the centre. Designing enrichment is really only limited by your imagination - so don't be shy with your suggestions! It can be great fun - and watching the animals playing with your creations afterwards is extremely rewarding. Ask us for a copy of our Enrichment Catalogue for some ideas before you arrive.



Construction: Construction tasks vary greatly and could include:

- Climbing structures for orangutan, sun bears, clouded leopards, binturongs and other animals
- Building ponds for crocodiles, sun bears, orangutan and turtles
- Creating drainage for the centre
- Building boardwalks for easier tourist and keeper access
- Creating feeding platforms in the jungle for animals that are soft-released
- Constructing bridges in the jungle, for ease of access to rehabilitation sites
- New enclosures



WHAT TO EXPECT



No contact policy

If it has always been your dream to hold a baby orangutan, this is not the tour for you. When working around the orangutan and other wildlife, you will be expected to follow best practice guidelines for volunteering with great apes. There will be no physical contact with any of the animals at any time. This is for three main reasons:

1. The aim of the rehabilitation centres is to return the orangutan to the semi-wild, or wild in some cases. Close physical contact with many different people has an extremely detrimental effect on the behaviour of these animals. The more humans they are exposed to, the more they try to behave like us, rather than like orangutan, which only impedes their return to the trees.
2. There is a very real risk of disease transmission from humans to other animals and vice versa (zoonosis). Other primates are particularly susceptible to our airborne illnesses and in 0-3 year old orangutan, even a common cold can be fatal. All permanent staff that have contact with the primates are subject to blood screening.
3. The safety of the animals and the volunteer. Regardless of how long they have been kept in captivity and how "tame" they appear, these are wild animals. They tend to be equipped with their own arsenal of survival tools and humans are no match for the wrath of an angry bear, orangutan, monkey etc.

Please see our website www.projectborneo.org for a more detailed version of the Policy.

For some people this will be disappointing, but it gives you a realistic understanding of what the best care practices look like, for the welfare of the animals and humans alike. Our volunteers always find their tour incredibly enjoyable and worthwhile - please see their testimonials on the same website, or get in contact via our Project Borneo Facebook group to hear from them first-hand.

Animal care protocol

These protocols are for the health and safety of yourself, and the animals you are coming to help:

- Face-masks are to be worn at all times when in close proximity to the orangutan and gibbons, in order to prevent the spread of communicable diseases
- No food or drinks (outside of the diet provided by the centre) to be given to any of the animals at any time
- Always listen to and follow the instructions of your supervisor and the animal keepers
- When observing semi-wild orangutan, do not take food or drink into their areas, keep a safe distance and always follow the directions of the member of staff you are with



VOLUNTEER LIFE



There are 10 houses within Matang Wildlife Centre set aside for staff and volunteers. Each house is a separate unit consisting of 2 or 3 bedrooms, a communal living space, kitchen, toilet, shower and veranda area. There will be a maximum of 4 volunteers to a house, and if you are travelling as a couple, with friends, or with family members we will happily house you together. Your own room cannot be guaranteed, so please be prepared to be twin-sharing. Some of the single rooms have double beds, so if you are bringing a mosquito net it is best to buy a double, as obviously this will fit either bed type.

There is mains electricity, and a fan in each room to help keep you cool. There is no hot water, so the cold showers are also going to help keep your temperature down! These houses are very basic so do not expect toilets, showers and kitchens to be anything like you are used to in the Western world.

You will be self-catering with basic kitchen appliances including a gas hob (2 ring burner), fridge/freezer, kettle and toaster. Malaysian cuisine does not have a need for ovens, so they will not be found in your house (or generally in the country at large!). You are given a shopping budget of RM200 for a 2 week project and RM 400 for 4 weeks, and we will take you to a supermarket once a week for supplies. The closest grocery shops are a 30min drive from the centre.



VOLUNTEER LIFE



Free time

Volunteers will usually cook communally in each house, though some groups will all have dinner together. The evenings are quiet in the jungle, so you may want to bring books, cards, laptops or other entertainment. We also have many books and journal articles relating to wildlife and conservation issues if you are interested to learn a little more of an evening. However, you are living on a street with the local staff and other volunteers, so good old-fashioned socialising is a great way to spend time after work. Some volunteers have participated in football games after work in the local village. Although there is a beautiful river running through Matang, we recommend that you do not swim in it as crocodiles put in occasional appearances!

There are many lovely picnic areas, and trails to explore. However you should talk to the staff on site about safe areas to trek, as there are semi-wild orangutan living around Matang. You are advised never to venture into the jungle alone for your own safety.

Days off

As our projects run by dates rather than days of the week your "weekend" may not be Saturday and Sunday, however you will get two scheduled days off and are welcome to take more if you so desire. For many people, this will be a once in a lifetime trip to Borneo, and volunteers generally take advantage of the weekends to explore the surrounding area or go further afield. You may of course stay at Matang if you prefer.

There are several beautiful National parks relatively close by, including Bako, Kubah and Gunung Gading. Other popular weekend destinations include our non-profit resort near Lundu (for a touch of luxury!), lively Kuching city, Damai Beach, Sarawak Cultural Village, and Santubong for kayaking trips. We have written a comprehensive guide about these places which you will find in your volunteer houses when you arrive. Most of these destinations can be booked when you get here and you might wish to coordinate with other members of your group. However, a notable exception is Bako National Park which can book up months in advance. Bako is an easy day trip option from Matang but an overnight stay is highly recommended, and you might want to book that prior to arriving to avoid disappointment.



PRACTICAL POINTS



Know before you go

You will need to book your own flights, travel insurance and so on. We are not able to provide medical advice so prior to travel we recommend that you speak to a doctor about any vaccinations or medications you may need. Being prepared and doing some of your own research is always wise to help you manage your own expectations.

Cultural differences: Malaysia is officially a Muslim country although Sarawak is very culturally and religiously diverse. It is imperative that we respect local customs and religious sensitivities.

Changes to the project: Changes can happen at the last minute. If we say that something 'might' or could 'possibly' happen, it means just that.

Jungle reality: Borneo is full of beautiful rainforest and wildlife. Ants, moths, spiders and general bugs are plentiful so be prepared to encounter these types of critters on a daily basis. Some are absolutely stunning and bizarre, and some can cause injury if you accidentally stumble across them, so always be alert.

Physical Fitness/ Heat and Humidity: To participate on this project, a good level of fitness is required. The work is physical, and the heat and humidity add an extra challenge.

Personal Safety: You are travelling to a relatively safe area, though as with all places opportunistic crime and theft of valuables can occur. There is a severe penalty (death) for taking and dealing drugs. We hold a zero tolerance policy on drug use. Drinking alcohol is acceptable but rowdiness and excessive drinking is frowned upon.

Arrival day

When you arrive in Kuching:

- You should avoid mentioning 'volunteering' at Immigration. Although it is perfectly legal to volunteer, mentioning volunteer work could provoke a lot of confusion (working for free, let alone paying to work is an utterly strange concept in the developing world), which could result in a very long, unnecessary delay for you!
- By law you should have your passport on you at all times
- There is no airport tax on arrival or departure that needs to be paid at the airport. These taxes would have been paid with the flight ticket
- We will meet you in the arrivals lounge. In the unlikely event that we are not there when you arrive, it is probably due to bad traffic or terrible weather. You can always contact Leo, Project Borneo CEO on (+60) 0138 456 531 if required



PRACTICAL POINTS

Things to bring



- Lightweight clothes that you are comfortable walking in and do not mind getting dirty/ruined. Hoodies, long sleeves and trouser options are handy for the evenings
- Comfortable walking boots/shoes and ample pairs of long socks, particularly if you decide to use...
- ...Wellies/gum boots; often volunteers' preferred footwear. They are cheap and easy to buy after you arrive - also, plenty get left behind so it is worth checking the volunteer house first! However, Malaysian shoes are rarely found larger than an English size 8, European 42, so if your feet are bigger than this, you will need to bring your own
- Underwear - bring plenty!
- Swim-wear and towel
- Work gloves
- Poncho or waterproof coat
- Sun hat, sunglasses and sunscreen
- Flip-flops or sandals
- Re-usable straws, utensils, shopping bags and coffee mugs
- Re-usable water bottle; at least 1 litre capacity
- Snacks - especially if you are vegan or have allergies
- Day pack, and a water-proof bag for phones and cameras
- A torch
- Toiletries - try to go for things like bars of soap and solid shampoos to minimise the amount of plastics you leave behind. There is no plastic recycling in Borneo
- Mosquito net (double-bed size) and insect repellent
- Personal first-aid kit. As well as your own medications this should include something for diarrhoea and constipation, rehydration sachets and something to soothe itchy bites
- Books, iPods, pack of cards etc
- Travel plug adapter. Malaysian plug sockets are the same as the UK (3 pins)
- Money - make sure you've told your bank that you are travelling. You won't need a lot of cash but very few places accept card
- Mobile phones. There is good coverage at Matang so your mobile should work well. Roaming charges, however, can often be horrendous. Local SIM cards are very cheap (less than RM10), as are international phone calls to landlines - calls to other mobiles are more expensive. It might be worth unlocking your phone before travelling
- For the ladies - tampons aren't readily available so you might want to come prepared!



PRACTICAL POINTS



Being a minimal waste traveller

Of course there is an environmental footprint associated with flying half-way across the world to Borneo, but arguably the bigger footprint is the amount of waste we generate in our day-to-day lives. There is no plastic recycling on Borneo so we suggest you spend a little bit of time planning your packing list in order to avoid bringing too many single-use plastic items. Some easy essentials are mentioned in the list on the previous page. Please resist the urge to buy new clothes specifically for the project, especially if you intend to bin them when you're finished. At the end of each fortnight we are inundated with clothes volunteers leave behind. Depending on the condition they are in we do wash most of it and either donate it locally or use it for enrichment. However, the 'fast fashion' industry is incredibly exploitative of humans and damaging to our planet. Therefore, if you don't have any clothes at home that you're happy to get muddy, sweaty and generally ruined then pop down to a charity shop and pick some bits up; it'll save you money and it won't cost the earth.

For more info about these issues you can check out:

Blue The Film: <https://bluethefilm.org/>

The True Cost: <https://truecostmovie.com/>

The Story of Stuff: <https://storyofstuff.org/>

