



# Matang Wildlife Centre Volunteer Project

**Location: Near Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo**

**Duration: 2 or 4 week projects**

**Focus: Enrichment, farming, construction and maintenance for an orangutan rehabilitation centre on Borneo, with many other endangered species**



## Contents

Page 1.	Title page
Page 2.	Contents
Page 3.	Project summary
Page 4.	Who we are
Page 5-6.	Your role – general information
Page 7.	Matang Wildlife Centre
Page 8-9.	Your daily work
Page 10-11.	Orangutan at Matang
Page 12-13.	Other animals you will meet
Page 14-15.	Where you will live
Page 16.	Free time
Page 17.	Your arrival day
Page 18.	Project itinerary
Page 19.	Things to bring
Page 20.	Reality check!
Page 21-22.	Testimonials
Page 23.	Don't take our word for it! Find past volunteers



## Project summary - Matang Wildlife Centre



Matang Wildlife Centre opened in 1997 and is the second rehabilitation centre for orangutan in the state of Sarawak. Its partner, Semenggoh Nature Reserve, opened in 1975 and is a rehabilitation centre for orangutan with currently 20+ individuals living semi-wild, never returning to cages or enclosures and breeding in the trees. However, the carrying capacity of this forested area has long since been reached, which inspired the construction of Matang. Both the animal centres and all the national parks in Sarawak are owned by the government and managed by Sarawak Forestry Corporation.



Matang Wildlife Centre is unique among the orangutan rehabilitation centres on Borneo in that as well as caring for and rehabilitating orangutan, it is also a rescue and rehab centre for any and all protected species. This is a very ambitious mandate for such a centre, and its function as such is not going to be realised without a lot of hard work! However, the potential of Matang to be a conservation tool for endangered species almost unlimited. This is why we have been based from here since our work started on Borneo in 2006, and why we continue to need volunteers to help, both physically and financially.

This volunteering program asks for participants who do not mind working incredibly hard and applying themselves to a multitude of different tasks, many of which you will have never done before, perhaps to help animals that you have never heard of! It will be a challenge, but one that you will find hugely worthwhile as many of the tasks you will work on have a very obvious, immediate impact on the welfare of the animals you will get to know well. You will also assist on-going construction projects at the centre, leaving a tangible impact behind you.

For the majority of the construction, local building companies are employed as obviously skilled and



experienced workmen are required. Volunteers sometimes assist the local workforce, though more commonly work on separate, independent projects that bring something extra and add value to the site. One of our philosophies is that volunteers on site should *only* be providing a benefit; they should not be a drain on financial or management resources of the authorities and their presence on site should not have a detrimental impact in any way. We work very closely with our partners to ensure our vision is shared, but on the ground we operate as independently as possible to provide a positive impact without requiring their management time, which is best spent on their own (rather substantial!) tasks and goals.

## Who we are



Orangutan Project Sdn Bhd is a Malaysian conservation company specialising in operating meaningful and responsible tours and volunteering projects in order to generating funding for wider conservation objectives. Our work is currently focused on Borneo, and though the primary focus has historically been orangutan welfare and conservation, we are interested in helping any and all protected wildlife, wherever possible.

We are proud to present a model of true eco-tourism, where funds generated by the volunteers and tourists that we work with are spent directly on our conservation and welfare work at the centres and in the areas that we are based. Though a lot of our work resembles that of charities or NGOs, we have chosen to operate as a commercial company to promote a more charitable means of running a business. We see no shame in a company aiming to achieve a profit, but our choice is to spend that profit on a cause in need, and the cause we care **passionately** about is the plight of endangered species.



As stated above, we believe that volunteers should only be providing a positive impact to the centres and/or animals they wish to help. All too often, travel agents will sell the theory that by simply turning up and volunteering your time, you are being helpful by default. This is a model that allows the agents to make maximum profit for minimum workload. The truth is, the management of a volunteer program that provides both a tangible, positive impact to its location and a meaningful, memorable experience to the participant requires a team of staff dedicated

to the project on the ground. A team of English-speaking facilitators is essential, as well as all the equipment that the person will need while working (paint, brushes, shovels, wheelbarrows, work gloves, saws etc). Expecting the centres to provide all of this actually places a burden upon them and prevents them continuing their daily work.

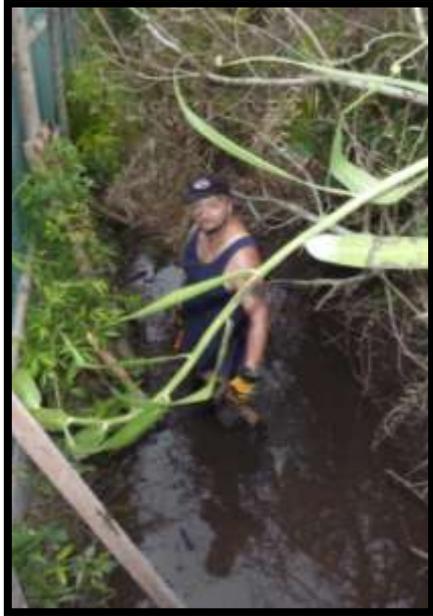
‘Volunteering’ is perhaps a misleading name for the opportunity we offer to work with us at the orangutan rescue and rehabilitation centres. It is more than working for free – volunteers pay to join us on our projects, and through this fee are actually funding a huge amount of required materials, essential members of staff and works undertaken on the ground. Simply expecting to work voluntarily is not always useful. A successful, meaningful volunteer program takes a lot of hard work to manage, and rehabilitation centres are expensive to run. It is therefore the only logical model that a volunteer should make a significant financial contribution as well. Orangutan Project is a financially transparent company, and will happily share publically any and all financial records, so you can be sure your money is used on the ground, at the centres, for the benefit of the animals you care about.



## Your role – general information

To participate on this project, a good level of fitness is required. The work is physical, and the heat and humidity add a challenging extra layer to this. Though there is a working schedule and plan for each volunteer group, please be aware you are coming to an operational rescue and rehabilitation centre, and we cannot predict what may happen each day, with potential new arrivals or any of the current animals under the centre's care. We ask that volunteers are willing to be flexible, and are tolerant of potential delays in or changes to the planned work as different projects may get re-prioritised.

You will also need patience as you adjust to 'Borneo time' – volunteers often come to the project with huge amounts of enthusiasm and energy to plough into the work, which is a massive asset and positively impacts on the energy levels of the full time staff. However, please be aware that within a four week project, you will simply be adding a helpful and necessary piece to a much larger puzzle, and you should **not expect** the world of orangutan conservation to make great strides forward in the timeframe of your project.



The Malaysian approach to work is also vastly different from the Western mentality. Speed and efficiency are replaced by relaxation and a distinct lack of urgency, regardless of the importance of the task. You will not change the mind-set of a nation in a short period of time, so please prepare to **embrace** this cultural difference rather than display frustration and/or incredulity at the local labouring techniques and ethos. Perhaps after a day or two of back-breaking work in 35°C heat, you may come to appreciate the more laid-back, relaxed approach!

Please be aware that you are coming to work at an animal centre in a developing country. Standards of animal welfare are not the same as would be expected of many captive institutions in the West. Things are far from perfect, and many animals are kept in conditions below standard. Orangutan Project staff are fully aware of the best captive management, enrichment and husbandry techniques, though it is not always straight forward to implement what we know to be the ideal given facilities, funding, external support and available workforce.

You should remember that:

- If all conditions were perfect for the animals, there would be no on-going need for volunteer funds or labour at the centre. One of the reasons you are there is to facilitate the 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 reasons can be



complex and varied, but we feel that to get the most out of your experience you should learn about some of 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 are committed to Matang for the long term, with the hope to realise many improvements over time.

- It is not always possible to improve the conditions for one individual animal or group of animals in the short time you will be with us on the project. This is not to say we will not be working towards such developments in the future.



When with us, you are treated as temporary members of staff. We expect you to participate in any and all jobs that are required for the centre's maintenance and development. We do not necessarily save 'best' jobs for volunteers, or 'worst' jobs (though it may sometimes feel that way!); 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. To this end, you may also get to witness events that are only the privilege of full-time members of staff: volunteers have been able to participate in animal releases; other groups have also been able to join the team on rescue and confiscation missions (taking a purely observational role of course).

You do not need any special skills or experience to be of use as a volunteer on this project. We have many years of experience creating programs and jobs that people from all backgrounds can participate in and get real

satisfaction from doing so. If people do come to the project with prior experience and skills, we will certainly try to make the most of this where we can, though it is not always possible. We generally create jobs and projects that anyone with a reasonable fitness level can help us with, as the majority of our volunteers do not have prior skills. It is therefore not always simple to reassign tasks and create projects to accommodate specific skills or requests, but we will certainly make use of builders/carpenters/welders/mechanics etc when and where we can!



Matang Wildlife Centre

Due to our working partnership with Sarawak Forestry Corporation, there is a dual staffing system at Matang with those employed by Orangutan Project and those employed by SFC. The Park Warden, an employee of SFC, is the overall manager of Matang Wildlife Centre and it is from him that we need to seek approval for any decisions made on the ground with regards to the animals or the enclosures. For any new areas we would like to build, we need to produce proposals that require his approval, and sometimes the approval of managers in higher positions within SFC.

The main administrative offices of SFC are located in Kuching, and positions senior to the park warden of Matang are based in the city. It can therefore be a somewhat lengthy process to secure approval for proposals we create, as it requires meetings to be held in the city with people who may not prioritise paperwork for Matang over and above the other roles they fulfil within the company.

Volunteers sometimes find it strange that it is not easier for us make decisions about the animals at Matang, or to build new areas that we deem necessary. However, Matang is not our centre – it belongs to the government of Sarawak and is not managed by us either. We are a foreign group, who would like to help the government, but we cannot expect to be allowed to simply take over one of their rehabilitation centres. Being a Western group that cares a lot about orangutan does not give us any authority over a government – and nor should it. We have worked hard over the years to ensure we are a trusted partner, and any advice we give or proposals we submit are taken seriously – but not necessarily treated as a priority over and above anything and everything else that Sarawak is working towards.

## Rehabilitation centre, or animal sanctuary?

A lot of the media surrounding animal rescue centres focuses on the good-news stories, providing the feel-good factor (often to elicit donations from viewers/readers) and creating the impression that rescuing animals and subsequently releasing them is the standard procedure and easily done.

Unfortunately, this is incredibly **far from the truth**, and the reality on the ground often leads visitors to ‘rehabilitation’ centres feeling jaded; as if they have just spent time in a make-shift zoo rather than a rehabilitation centre. People assume all the animals will be outside of enclosures, again due in large part to the Western media portraying close encounters with wild animals as safe, desirable and common place in centres like Matang.

The vast majority of the animals resident at Matang have been **confiscated** or **surrendered** from illicit pet trade; this means taken from their natural habitat (often as a result of their mums being killed), kept in highly inadequate housing for days/weeks/years, fed an incorrect diet and being incredibly humanised. All of these factors mean that an animal rescued from this is unlikely to return to a successful life in the wild – see the [IUCN Guidelines for the Placement of Confiscated Animals](#) for a more thorough look at some of these issues.

For the small percentage of animals that may be considered for release, it is important to not simply ‘dump’ them back in the forest and 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, with a variety of species. The most common causes of mortality are conflict with humans and starvation. Where release is possible, it is important to do so responsibly, and track the animal in question to ascertain success (or not). Having inadequate housing at a rescue centre is not reason enough release an ex-captive animal into the wild, and assume it will lead a happier life. Removing the problem from your immediate sight has done nothing to tackle the actual problem.

## Your daily work

The work at this project site is always **varied** and we will arrange a working schedule for each volunteer group, ensuring that you will be set on a different task each day. Most of the work is physically demanding and always outdoors, meaning you also have to cope with the tropical elements. You should truly be prepared for anything! The main working groups through 2013 were:

- Construction – construction tasks in the past have been varied and 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 around the centre
  - Creating feeding platforms in the jungle for animals that are soft-released
  - A ranger station, built for rehabilitation of orangutan
  - Bridges in the jungle, for ease of access to rehabilitation sites
  - New enclosures – often volunteers are assisting an existing local team of contractors with these projects
- Maintenance – the rainforest is a harsh environment for the longevity of 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 work is usually a lot of cleaning, painting and repairing.
- Enrichment – enrichment is obviously an essential task to maintain the mental and physical health of the many animals that are captive at Matang. This is one of the most important jobs that you will have at the centre, as without volunteers enrichment does not get made. Without a stimulating environment, captive animals can become incredibly stressed, bored and sick as a consequence. Enrichment is really only limited to the imagination of the animals' carer, so please don't be shy to suggest ideas that we could try out when you are here!
- Farming – in 2012, Orangutan Project bought land close to Matang Wildlife Centre with the intention of growing food for the many resident animals. The food bill for a centre like Matang can be incredibly expensive, so we thought it would be sensible to create our own farm to enable a sustainable food production for the future. This project has only been possible thanks to the hard labour of our volunteers, and expanding and maintaining it is now a regular task of our volunteer project.
- Husbandry – husbandry simply means cleaning, feeding and caring for captive animals, and through 2012-13 volunteers were helping out with husbandry for orangutan, sun bears and smaller primates at Matang.



When working around the orangutan, you will be expected to follow best practise guidelines for volunteering with great apes, which include:

- **No physical contact** *at any time* with any of the orangutan. This is for two 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. Orangutan are very smart, and learn very efficiently through observation and imitation. Therefore, 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 orangutan (zoonosis), and in the 0-3 year old orang-utan, even a common cold can be fatal. Increasing the number of people who have close contact with the orangutan simply increases the chance that a potentially fatal pathogen is transmitted to these animals. Permanent staff that have contact with the animals are all subject to blood screening, which we do not insist on for volunteers.

**Please see Orangutan Project's No Contact Policy for further discussion of this issue**

- **Facemasks** are to be worn at all times when in close proximity to the orangutan. When participating in orangutan enrichment, you will often be just 2-3 metres away from the animals with only a cage between you. Therefore, a physical barrier to prevent the spread of communicable diseases is mandatory for all volunteers.
- No food or drinks (outside of the diet provided by the centre) to be given to the orangutan at any time.
- Always listen to and follow the instructions of your supervisor/the animal keepers/the rangers.
- When observing semi-wild orangutan, do not take food or drink into their areas, keep a safe distance from the animal and always follow the directions of the member of staff you are with.

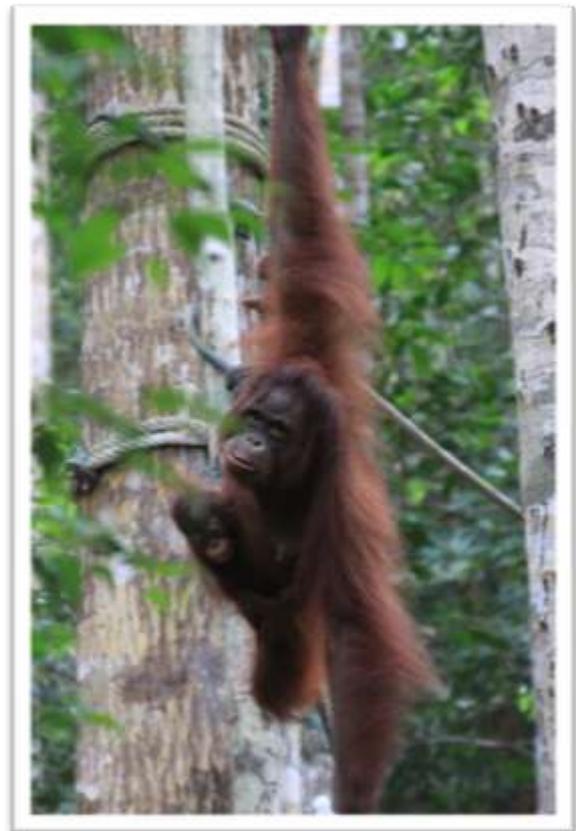
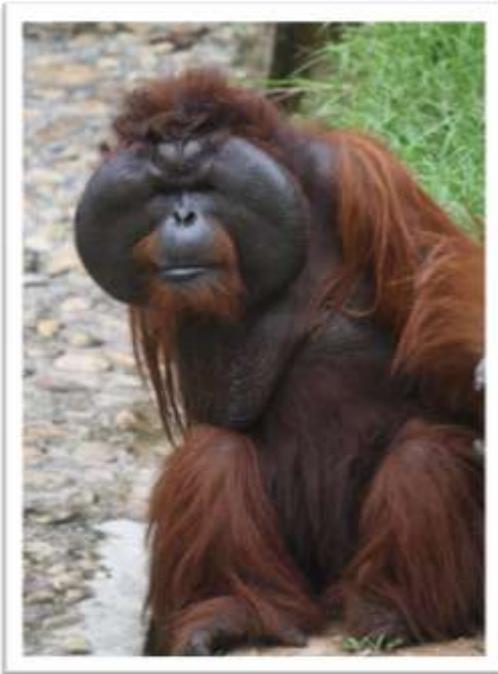
These guidelines are for the safety both of yourself, and the animals that you are coming to help.

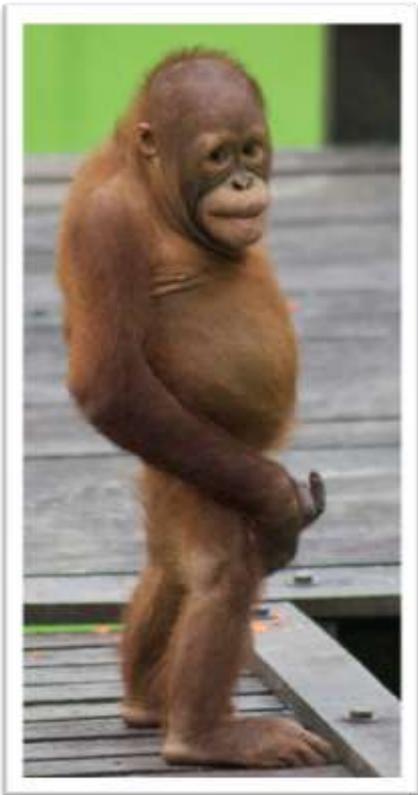
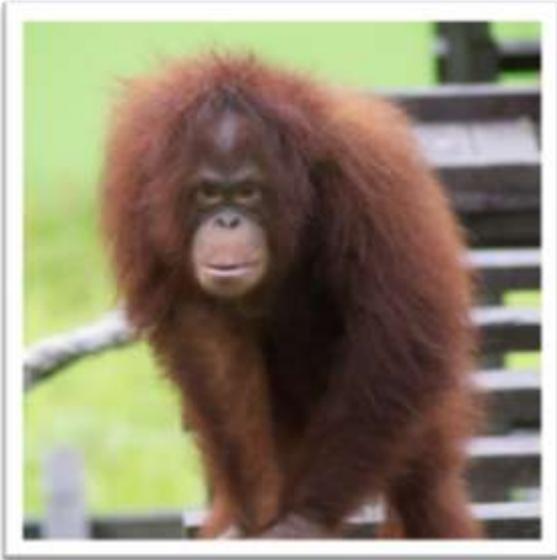
For a volunteer program to truly be of the most benefit to the orangutan, the volunteers should not really even see the orangutan. The detrimental impact of habituation and humanisation on these animals cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, the media and charities, particularly surrounding orangutan rehabilitation centres and conservation, are saturated with images of white people hugging the animals, especially baby orangutan. This creates the misleading impression that to be of use in a primate rehabilitation centre, all you need do is love the monkeys and fuss over them as you would a human child.



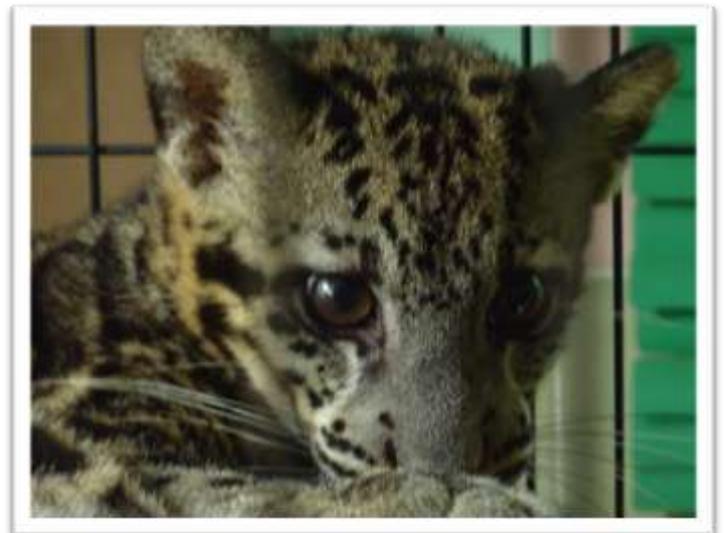
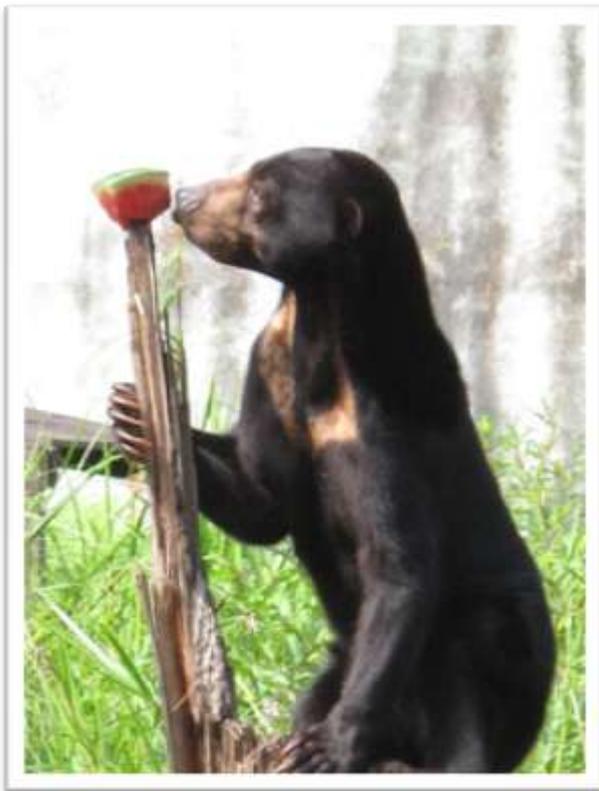
We are working to create a new model of tourism and volunteering, where the interaction with the orangutan is kept to an absolute minimum, yet the impact and educational value to the human participant is incredibly high.

## Orangutan at Matang





## Other animals you will meet



## Where you will live



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.

Your own room cannot be guaranteed, so please be prepared to be twin-sharing.

There will be a maximum of 4 volunteers to a house.

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 in the houses, and there is 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 – **do not expect** things like toilets, showers and kitchens to be anything like you are used to in the Western world!

You will be self-catering with only basic kitchen appliances such as 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 budget for shopping – RM200 for a 2 week project and RM 400 for 4 weeks – and taken to a supermarket once a week. The closest grocery shops are a 30min drive from the centre.

Most things that you would buy at home can now be found in Malaysia, and English is widely used and spoken so the supermarket should not pose too much of a problem. One notable exception is dairy produce – good cheese, butter, milk and yoghurts are

very hard to come by, so be prepared to go dairy-free for the time you are there.

Volunteers will usually cook communally in their separate houses, though some groups will have dinner all together each evening.

The evenings are quiet in the jungle, so you may want to bring books, iPods or other entertainment. However, you are living on a street with the local staff and other volunteers, and past groups that have come equipped with many books expecting lots of time to themselves have actually found that the time passed incredibly quickly in socialising. Some volunteers have participated in daily football games after work in the local village.

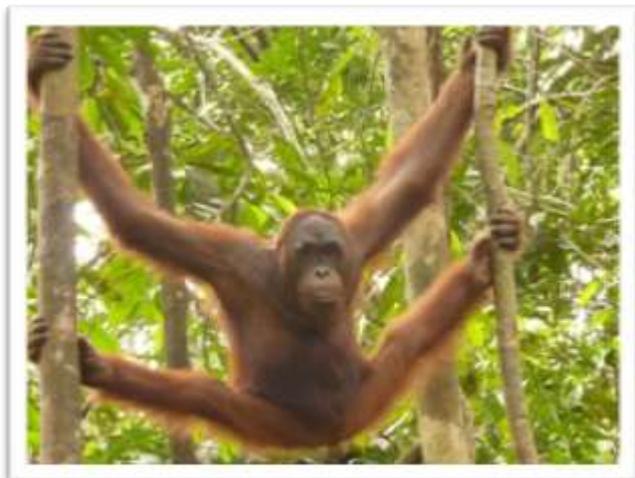
Each house has amassed a collection of books left by other volunteers, so you will not be wanting for reading material. We also have many books and journal articles relating to orang-utan, other wildlife and conservation issues if you are interested to learn a little more of an evening.

### **Personal Safety**

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

## Free time

The working week is Monday to Friday and you will have weekends off (dependent on your arrival day – if you arrive on a Thursday, we will make you work that weekend!). 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.



Included in your project is a trip to Semenggoh, Sarawak's second orang-utan rehabilitation centre. This centre was established in the 70s, and has a small population of semi-wild orang-utan. It is a good opportunity to see orang-utan living in the trees, and a chance to understand the relationship between tourism and the rehabilitation centres. Semenggoh operates limited opening times, so in the afternoon of this day you will be taken to the Wind and Fairy caves, which are spectacular.

On weekends, volunteers have visited numerous locations, including:

- Bako National Park
- Kuching City
- Damai Beach
- Sarawak Cultural Village
- Gunung Gading National Park – home of the rafflesia, the world's largest flower
- Santubong – for kayaking trips
- Kubah National Park



With budget flights often available, it is possible to head further afield for your weekend. Other destinations some volunteers have hit are:

- Sabah – Malaysia's second state on Borneo, famous for its dive sites and Mount Kinabalu
- Singapore
- Mulu National Park – within Sarawak but a flight is needed to get there. You may of seen the Niah Caves of this park featured on the BBC's Planet Earth

When you are onsite, you can talk to your facilitators about organising possible trips for you. We are more than happy to act as your personal travel agents – this is one of our many hats!

If you are on a tight budget, you can of course stay at Matang during the weekends. We cannot guarantee that we can offer you work at the centre though, as staff will often take these days off, or are required to perform other roles, such as tourist management.

Please note that though there is a beautiful river running through Matang, we recommend that you **do not** swim in it – crocodiles are a rare occurrence there, but they are a very real risk if you are unlucky enough to encounter one! There are many lovely picnic areas, and trails to explore. 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 to never venture into the jungle alone for your own safety.

# Your arrival day

## What to do when you arrive

You will arrive in Kuching the capital of Sarawak Malaysian Borneo. There is no airport tax on arrival or departure that needs to be paid at the airport. These taxes would be paid with the flight ticket.

- You must declare you are staying for a maximum of 3 months and tick off purpose of visit being for social or holiday purposes.
- Volunteers with valid European passport will be given at most 3 months social/holiday visa on arrival – free. Extension can be applied for at Immigration in Malaysia for an extra 30 or 60 days.
- Volunteers should avoid mentioning “volunteering”. Though it is not illegal to volunteer, mentioning volunteer work would provoke a lot of confusion at immigration (working for free, let alone *paying* to work is an utterly strange concept to developing countries), which could result in a very long, unnecessary delay for you!
- Volunteers from Europe and US and Australia will not need a letter of invitation from us.
- By law volunteers should always have their passports on them or to hand.

## When will we be met?

We will be picking you up at the airport and failing unforeseen delays, will be awaiting you at the arrivals lounge. We will then drive you to Basaga Holiday Residences, where you will be spending the first night of your trip.

You will then have a welcome dinner with us and your fellow volunteers at 6pm. If your flights arrive some days prior please ensure you are at Basaga at this time. Transfer to Matang will happen the following day at around 12pm.

## What to do if we don't meet you?

It is incredibly unlikely that we will not be at the airport, awaiting you in the arrivals lounge. At worst, we may be a little late due to bad traffic or terrible weather. If we are running late though, and you'd like to call us to make sure we're coming, please use:

- (006) 0138456531 for Leo Biddle or
- (006) 0148856488 for Natasha Beckerson

## Project itinerary

Day	Activity
1	<p>Arrive to Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. Transfer to Basaga Lodge, a comfortable and stylish guest house, to meet Orangutan Project 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 simple amenities!</p> 
2	<p>Move to Matang! You will enjoy a catered lunch before being taken on a tour of the park by resident Orangutan Project staff to meet all the animals and start to get to know 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.</p> 
3 – 14/28	<p>Work! Much of the work on this project is physical, and the heat and humidity add an extra challenging layer to this. You will be carrying out a variety of tasks including husbandry, construction work, enrichment, maintenance and farming. The ‘best’ jobs are not saved for the volunteers – you are treated as pseudo-staff members for the time you are with us, and wherever you may be useful is where we will task you!</p> 
14/28	<p>Return to Basaga for the final night with your group/continue work at the centre if you are part of a 4 week project</p> 
15/29	<p>Onward flights, transfer from Basaga included</p>

## Things to bring

- A torch – power cuts are a frequent occurrence
- Lightweight clothes that you do not mind getting dirty/ruined
- Wellington boots/gum boots – these are often volunteers' preferred footwear, particularly for husbandry which involved a lot of water and working in some swampy enclosures. If you would rather not squeeze these into your bag, they are very cheap and easy to buy when you are there. Also, it is worth checking the volunteer houses first for any leftovers, as we generally recommend that you leave your rubber boots behind. However, tall people beware! 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.
- Long socks – our most frequent volunteer injury is 'wellie rash', or chafing of the gum boots on the lower leg.
- Mosquito net – double-bed size (see above)
- Books, iPods, pack of cards etc
- Sun cream
- Rehydration sachets
- Travel plug adapter – Malaysian plug sockets are the same as England (3 pins), so if you are coming from the UK you will not need an adapter
- Work gloves – something like simple gardening gloves, easily and cheaply available from hardware stores
- Poncho or waterproof coat – this is personal preference. If you are caught in a proper tropical downpour, nothing is really going to keep you dry! Lightweight cotton clothing will dry very quickly anyway, and we always find that an extra layer simply makes you sweat more, so you end up wet regardless.
- Money – if you grocery-shop like a local (vegetables, rice and noodles) and stay at Matang on your weekends, you can pass 2-4 weeks barely spending anything. There is nothing to buy at Matang with the exceptions of souvenirs (t-shirts, artistic prints, photographs etc). ATMS are easily available if your cash card works overseas, so you can always draw out money if needed. A float of RM300-400 should easily see you through the basics.
  - The UK pound is equal approximately to 5 Malaysian Ringgits though this does fluctuate widely. Malaysia is relatively cheap once you stay away from western outlets, eateries etc. food is cheap at approx. £1-2 pounds for breakfast or lunch –including juice, and £2-3 for dinner. Alcohol is more expensive at £1 for a can of beer. Western bars are same price as at home or sometimes more expensive. Local bars are much cheaper but nightclubs are same price as London on average. Hostels can range from very cheap and grotty at £1.5 to very clean and nice hostels for £8-10 pounds. Hotels can range from £25 for 2-3 stars. 4 and 5 stars will be over £40.
- **Telephones** – there is (strangely) very good coverage within Matang and Kubah National Park, so your mobile phones will work well. Roaming charges, however, can often be horrendous. It is often worth buying a local SIM card when in country – they cost less than RM10, and international phone calls are incredibly cheap (to landlines, calls to other mobiles are more expensive). It may be worth unlocking your phone before travelling, or alternatively very cheap mobiles phones (less than RM80) can be bought.
- The expectation to be hot, dirty and sweaty for most of the time!

There is no internet at Matang, and no postal service to the centre. Post can be sent *out* from post offices in the city.

## Reality check!

Before booking you will have already considered your motivations for volunteering. However, please also consider the following:

- **Cultural differences** - Malaysian Borneo is different to the life in your country. You should expect customs that may seem unfamiliar and research as much as possible beforehand on Asian and Malaysian culture. Bear in mind the realities of working in a developing country
- **Animal care** - Expect different standards than those that you are used to at home. Some of the animals are kept in what we might consider poor conditions and keepers may care for the animals in ways that you may not understand or agree with.
- **Working with animals** - Animals are often wild, unpredictable and can cause you great harm if given the opportunity. It is for your safety that we restrict direct contact with animals
- **Changes to the project** - Changes can happen last minute. If we state that something "might" happen or could "possibly" happen, it means just that, do not come with the attitude that you will participate in every activity.
- **Jungle reality** - Borneo is a beautiful rainforest full of wildlife that you will be exposed to no matter where you are. You may see many animals and some can cause injury if you accidentally stumble across them, so it is important that when you are trekking to stay with the group and not wander off ahead. Carry an open mind and alert one.
- **Heat and humidity** – Even relatively easy tasks can be incredibly strenuous when you are not used to being active in heat and humidity. Please be realistic with regards to your own physical capabilities – if you struggle walking uphill at home and never do any physical exercise, you will find even the simplest work very challenging in the jungle.

Though Malaysian is a Muslim country, Sarawak is a predominantly Christian state. Therefore there are not the same regulations and/or sensitivities as peninsular Malaysia to be aware of with regards to clothing. Shorts and vest tops are perfectly acceptable attire in Sarawak.

However, Western people are still somewhat of a novelty. Expect almost everyone that you meet to say hello to you, smile and wave, ask for a photo with you and attempt to engage you in conversation. If your clothing is particularly skimpy, you may draw even more attention than the average foreign tourist, which may not be welcome. Western women are viewed as sexually liberated to the point of promiscuous, so try not to be offended if a conversation consists of:

- 'Hello! Where you from?'... 'You come to my house?' – a simple smile and 'No thanks' works perfectly. You will receive a smile in return and probably 'Welcome to Malaysia!'.

## Testimonials

Amy Wong, September 2011

I learnt so much more about the dangers the orangutan and many wild animals face at the hands of humans. I have a greater respect for Orang-utan; they are incredible creatures to observe at such close quarters. I also learnt that I had a lot more endurance and perseverance than I thought I had. I believe the special skills I've acquired during the program include sawing, hammering, scrubbing, mixing cement and coping with the heat & humidity!

Sarah Wadham, August 2011

I particularly enjoyed carrying the roof through the jungle(!) and building the platform for the babies, as both of these activities are very different to things than I would normally do at home, and I knew I was doing something useful that the orang-utans would benefit from. It was nice to make a contribution.

I also enjoyed making the enrichment, as I could then watch the animals enjoying it.

Rachel Tedford, June 2011

There was so much information you could take in from this experience. I learnt so much about each of the individual orang-utan. It was great to learn about their characters and to just watch them each day. It gave me a great insight into how they care for each animal in Matang and the different needs that they all have. I also learnt about the animals' nutritional needs and what they would be like if they were in their natural habitats.

I learnt other skills such as building a shelter for the younger orang-utan, painting the cages, putting wire around cages and also grouting. These were all basic skills but such a satisfying job knowing you were helping a GREAT cause.

You could clearly see that the people that work there are trying their hardest to make sure that the orang-utan can one day live in their natural environment. Many people from the outside will not understand the processes that each orang-utan has to go through so they can be semi-wild. But for the volunteers we were able to learn why some will never be able to go back and watch those that are in the process of becoming semi-wild orang-utan.

Ellie Bragan-Turner, August 2011

The results of the husbandry could be seen every day and were very satisfying, even though it only took the animals a fraction of the time to reverse the effects! The building was also particularly satisfying, especially when we got to see the baby orang-utans on the platform we'd built before we left.

The stories we were told made me realise what a frustrating job everyone involved in orang-utan conservation has, but also what an incredible job people like those at Matang are doing, and how positive their work and achievements are.

Sandra Azcona, July 2011

In Matang, I realised the huge amount of work that must be done every day to help the animals. I knew that I would contribute in a limited way but I did everything I could and I was really motivated to work hard. At the end of each day I really felt satisfied about my contribution and happy to be able to do something for the animals.

The accomodation was basic but it was much better than I had expected. Even the cold shower wasn't as bad as I thought. It was a good surprise to see that there were very few insects in the house! I also really enjoyed being able to sit on the terrace in the evening.

This is an amazing opportunity to be close to the animals, to learn a lot about them and about the country. And it is a great feeling to know that you are doing something for the animals you love ! It is also an opportunity to meet nice people. I am glad I stayed one month, it allowed me to get to know the animals much better.

I think this program is great for everyone who likes animals. I was a bit afraid before going but everything is so well organised, there is really no reason to be afraid. For me, it was the best experience in my life! I really miss being close to the orang-utans and can't wait to return to Matang!

Jain Laird, March 2011

I really enjoyed the different personalities of the Orang-utans and I am a bit in love with Aman. When Chiam came down on the last day and attacked Eddie it was incredibly scary and I thought it was going to end very badly but what a great exit to the experience. It made me VERY aware that these are wild animals that should be treated with respect and awe. I think we all got a bit complacent by the end because it is really hard not to humanise the animals and get very comfortable but suddenly Chiam made us aware of exactly who is in charge and rightly so!

Katherine Bubb, January 2011

I thought it was well run and managed, it had variety and was relevant. We weren't doing jobs for the sake of being kept busy, the work really needed to be done. I appreciate the clarity of where my money was going and the fact it is not run as a "tourist operation" but an avenue of creating funds for the animals.

Kelsy Smith, November 2010

I learnt so much, went to some great places and met some great people. I also made a few animals more comfortable and entertained.

Lis Weidt, August 2010

My favourite activity was the enrichment because it felt like it was making a small difference to the daily lives of the macaques especially and was a great opportunity to interact and observe the orang-utan.

Debbie Spencer, May 2010

I had secretly hoped that you would get to hold one of the orang, but after hearing why you don't (and being grabbed by Doris) I fully understand why! My Matang experience was thoroughly wonderful. The combination of staff, fellow volunteers, animals and activities made the most memorable memories for me that I will never forget. If I could, I would be back there tomorrow! I would like to think that my extra set of hands were used where they were needed and put to good use and that their presence was more of a help than hindrance.

Helene Narvstad, April 2010

Apart from a dripping ceiling and a mysterious noise in one of the bedrooms (we THINK it was a barking frog, but you never know!! It's a jungle out there ;) ) the houses were very nice. It was a BIG plus that there were books in there to read after work!

I'm in love with the jungle! I especially liked that it was so remote that you really felt like you were 'out there' in the wild, but still you were able to go back to 'civilization' in Kuching in the weekends.

I liked that it was explained WHY something was prohibited (like going to near the cages etc), and that it was done with a fair bit of humour - like stories about what had happened to tourists who didn't take the safety regulations seriously. It made me respect the animals, without being afraid of them.

Finally, we strongly recommend that you join our facebook group, [Project Orangutan](#), and get in touch with volunteers that have already participated on the project. They can give you an honest appraisal of their experience with us on this project, and can also provide you with general advice. We obviously think this is an incredible project and that you will learn a huge amount and have a fantastic experience - however, as its creators we are bound to say this! So please find our community of past volunteers and find out what they have to say

