



The Darjeeling District, your new home during your volunteer teaching placement, nestles between Nepal and Bhutan. The majority of people are Nepalese and the chief industry is tea cultivation, drying and mixing. Darjeeling, a large hilltop city, lies close to the border with Sikkim to the north. It is an area of great beauty, served by some pretty awful roads and the amazing, famous Darjeeling Hill Railway! Our gap year and volunteer projects in the Darjeeling area are based near the towns of Kalimpong and Mirik. We work with schools that cater largely for the local Nepali population, as well as some boarders from Nepal, which is very close by. English is very important in India - many states do not speak Hindi - and your teaching placement will allow you to help give these children a real start in life, as well as providing a window on the wider world.

## Project Summary

**Departs:** February

**How long?** 12 / 16 weeks

**Accommodation:** Self catered AV houses

**Project Work:** Teaching, Art, Music, Drama, Sport  
Community Work

**Explore Further:** Trekking, Temples, Beaches, Wildlife



## Project Overview

<b>Orientation + Briefing (4 days)</b>	Orientation course at the Wayside Inn, on the banks of the River Teesta. A chance to get to know your AV group whilst learning basic Nepali and attending briefings on teaching, keeping safe, staying healthy and Indian culture.
<b>Project Work (Approx 10-12 weeks)</b>	Living and working in Kalimpong or Mirik, in the Darjeeling area of West Bengal. AV volunteers teach, get involved in extra curricular clubs or work in the wider community. Together with fellow AVs you will live in local houses, with a high level of independence. Spending significant time in one place lets you become fully involved and gain a sense of achievement.
<b>Optional Independent Travel (+ 4 weeks)</b>	Explore India further using the confidence and local knowledge gained on your project to make the most of your travels. Trek up into the Himalayas; visit famous temples, bustling towns and colourful markets; experience the Indian Railway network travelling from place to place and relax on beaches. You choose what you do, but we are still on hand to help.

## Detailed Itinerary

### ARRIVING IN INDIA AND THE DARJEELING DISTRICT

The group flight departs from London Heathrow and will be seen off by one of the AV team. You will fly into Calcutta (or Kolkata), where you will be met by Tendup Lama, AV's representative based in Darjeeling. Depending on flight times you may have a day in Calcutta where you can visit the Victoria Memorial, Mother Theresa's 'Mother House' or perhaps the busiest bridge in the world (over the Hooghly River). That night, accompanied by Tendup, you will catch the overnight sleeper train to New Jalpaiguri, the station for Siliguri and the Himalayas, arriving in time for breakfast. Indian trains are an experience like no other and a great way to travel long distances across the country. They are very sociable and there is never a dull moment: you could find yourself holding the baby for the family next to you, listening to musicians, or watching the cobbler at work!

### BRIEFING AND ORIENTATION

From Siliguri you will all take a bus to the banks of the Teesta river and the Wayside Inn where we start the Orientation Course. This is a chance to settle in, unwind after the hectic few days leading up to your departure, long journey and an opportunity to get to know your AV group. The orientation course is important for making sure you're fully prepared when you arrive in your school. It will be led by Tendup, giving you a chance to get to know him too. In a stunning steep-sided valley with the town of Kalimpong about 3000ft above you will cover:

- Nepali (the standard language in these parts)
- Indian and Nepali history, customs and culture
- Safety, health and security
- Techniques for teaching English

During the course you will visit Kalimpong to buy traditional local clothing - Kurta Pajama – to wear when teaching. After the course we will take you and your partner to your town/village home for the next three months. We are currently working with schools near Kalimpong and Mirik. To get there we go up through the tea plantations to about 7000ft before descending to around 6000ft for Mirik or 4000ft for Kalimpong

Here the AV representative will leave you to settle into your new home, but remember they're never more than a phone call away if needed!

### THE PROJECT

You will be assigned to a school with a fellow volunteer and will be working as teaching assistants for a full term or 12 weeks, with a long weekend break for half term. Most schools are primary, but may grow into middle schools with pupils up to 16 years old. They are a mix of small, old traditional schools, mostly in wooden buildings with quite small classes, and newer schools with concrete buildings and larger classes. Most classes are between 15 and 30. Children are taught in Nepali, but you will teach English, in English! For some older classes you may be asked to teach other subjects in English. We aim for you to teach up to four periods, 45 minutes long, each day - but you will often be in greater demand.

There are few sporting facilities in the area as the hills are too steep to carve out many football pitches. However there are often basketball-sized courts and you will find cricket or football being played in any open spaces that do exist. Organising extra football or cricket clubs after school is both rewarding and greatly appreciated. The towns have pitches for use at weekends and you will be very popular if you arrange inter-school matches. Most children return home at the end of school but you would be popular if you can help with some games or music, art and drama. The head teacher will be your main point of contact and will look after you but other members of staff will also have enough English to chat with and become friends.

At weekends you can stay at home or travel further afield. You may take part in school activities, organising sports or going on picnics. Alternatively you can head into town to shop, check emails, catch up on news from home, or meet up with other AVs, visit their schools and travel in the local area. The 'Darjeeling District' AVs sometimes head up to the Lepchas to visit the AVs up in the hills or entertain the Lepcha AVs in Kalimpong, particularly if there local festivals going on such as Holi, the Festival of Colour.

To find out what a typical day on project might be like take a look at our ['Day in the life of an AV'](#) feature, written by AVs who have been there and done it themselves!

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## Food + Accommodation

You will live in a designated AV apartment or flat with fellow volunteers, not far from the school. An important part of the AV experience is living in local accommodation, shopping at markets, being invited to fellow teachers' houses as well as entertaining the staff. The school will often give you lunch and this is a great way of socialising and getting to know the teachers. There is one apartment in Kalimpong and one in Mirik, the number of fellow volunteers you will live with depends on where you have been placed and the size of the AV group. The apartment itself will have a bedroom(s), a shower and a loo, a communal kitchen and living room. Electricity can be intermittent so prepare for frequent power cuts! You will grow to love it and soon feel very much at home!

We encourage independence and so you won't have someone cooking and looking after you – its a chance to step up and take responsibility for yourself. You will be given a daily food allowance and expected to shop at the markets and cook for yourself. This is the best way of getting to know people, being involved in the community and gaining an understanding of living there – you are not a bystander watching from afar.

The AV representatives are never far away and there whenever needed. They can be contacted by phone 24/7 and will visit you during your project. Most day-to-day questions can be answered by your hosts or school.

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## Optional Independent Travel

As your project comes to an end AV offers you the chance to stay on for an additional four weeks of independent travel time, to ensure a good balance of volunteering and adventure. India is a vast country

with lots of exciting and beautiful places to explore beyond the Darjeeling District, which you won't get a chance to see on your weekends. From our experience travelling is often when problems occur, from lost passports to falling ill – that's why we offer this extra time to ensure that you experience as much as possible but with the continued 24/7 support from us whilst you do so.

Different travel options India AVs have done in the past include: trekking to Kanchenjunga base camp, watching the dawn come up on the Ganges at the holy city of Varanasi; visiting Rishikesh, where the Beatles meditated (and there is said to be good rafting nearby); seeing a Bengal tiger in the wild; visiting the Golden Temple in Amritsar, one of the many carved temples - at Mahabelipuram, Khajurao, Ellora; floating down the backwaters of Kerala on a houseboat; being an extra in a Bollywood movie; basking on a beach in Goa? riding an elephant up the path to a castle in Jaipur, the 'Pink City'; going on a camel trek in the desert at Jaisalemeer, spending the night in the desert under the stars and of course visiting the Taj Mahal! Tendup will be on hand before you start your travels to advise you on the Indian Railway Network, the best routes to get around and how to do so safely!

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## Dates + Costs

For current AV departure dates + costs please visit the website – [www.aventure.co.uk](http://www.aventure.co.uk)

### AV PROJECT COSTS INCLUDE:

#### Before departure:

- Pre-departure information, support and advice
- A nominated member of the UK volunteer support team
- One-to-one face to face briefing for UK applicants
- Telephone briefing for non-UK applicants
- References taken up
- Comprehensive online health check
- Advice on group flight booking or individual flight arrangements
- Briefing for group departure from London airport

#### In-country:

- In-country representative
- 24/7 in-country backup
- Meet and greet at airport (if arriving with the group)
- Airport transfer (if arriving with group)
- In-country induction course
- Transfer from induction course to school/project
- Accommodation (except during independent travel)
- Food allowance (except during independent travel)
- Management of emergencies, including lost passport, illness, etc. whilst in-country

Upon returning home:

- Returning home advice
- Full telephone debriefing

**AV PROJECT COSTS DO NOT INCLUDE**

- Flights
- Travel Insurance
- Country visas
- Meeting of non-group arrivals
- Accommodation for early/late arrivals
- Medical expenses, e.g. inoculations, malaria prophylactics
- In-country medical expenses
- Drinks
- Tips/gratuities - No tips/gratuities for AV staff are necessary or expected
- Spending money
- Extra activities that you choose to do
- Food, transport and accommodation on independent travel

**Still got questions?** We're here to answer them and remember if you want to talk to an AV volunteer who has been there and done it just let us know and we'd be happy to put you in touch! Contact the AV office on +44(0)1380 729009 or [info@aventure.co.uk](mailto:info@aventure.co.uk)