



people and places: responsible volunteering

SUMMER

2009

"Truly accountable, ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel"

Newsletter

EDITOR Nigel Pegler

we work with communities in

AFRICA; The Gambia, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland
ASIA; Indonesia, Nepal and India SOUTH AMERICA; Peru

From the Editor!

OK everyone – I've asked before, but I'm asking again: "PLEASE send me contributions for the next newsletter!" Sallie and Kate are forever reminding me (in the nicest possible way!) that this is supposed to be a VOLUNTEERS' NEWSLETTER, so why am I publishing so much of what they send in? Well, the answer is simple – they send me loads more contributions than volunteers do ... I hear all kinds of gossip, news and views through the grapevine, but it doesn't seem to make it to my desk.

So – volunteers who are still making plans – tell us what's going on! What do your friends and family think? Are your work colleagues pulling your leg about your 'busman's holiday'? Are the children in your school collecting info about your destination? Are you excited / worried about what you're about to do? How can you justify spending so much money at the moment? Where are you going and how did you make the choice?

And volunteers who've come back from their placements – what's it like being home again? What are the highs and lows of your time away? Would you go back? What's happened since? Have you been giving talks or just driving your friends mad?

You might think that no-one will be interested in what you've got to say – that's extremely unlikely, and you may well open the flood gates when people realise that they're not alone in what they're doing, thinking, worrying about, looking forward to ...

Your contributions don't have to be masterpieces just an honest and heartfelt account of your experiences which can be so much help to future volunteers, letting them know what to expect in the way of accommodation, food etc and maybe giving some ideas for advancement of the project you worked on.

Please send any contributions to...newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Right then – come on everyone – get that keyboard working

people and places – out and about in October!

Saturday 3rd & Saturday 10th October 2009

Sallie and I are repeatedly asked why we don't arrange meetings, presentations, social events – occasions when volunteers can meet us and each other. The social aspects of any such get-togethers are obvious – but there's actually a lot more to it than that! Sallie and I may know our partners and the projects inside out and backwards ... but not as volunteers! Returned volunteers can share their experiences, offer mutual 'tea and sympathy', pool ideas, identify need ... and much more besides. They are also in by far the best position to talk with future volunteers about the realities, thrills and spills of the whole experience – their advice will be invaluable!

So – we've been racking our brains as to how on earth we can possibly afford to get out and about – more than once a year and somewhere other than London! One Life Live, the annual spring show that we attend, proves again and again that talking with people, listening to comments and concerns, answering questions is good for all of us. Volunteers get to meet us face to face, and we get to meet you (while also escaping from our cupboard-sized office!).

Well – we've done it! The dates and venues are booked, and details will follow. Please let us know if you'd like to come and meet us on either of the following dates, and if you'd be coming alone or with a friend, partner, colleague – the more, the merrier ... but we'll need to limit numbers of course!

Saturday 3rd October – Faversham Saturday 10th October – Leeds

We look forward to meeting you!

Kate

PERU– We are now recruiting volunteers for the Peru project, you can view it with this link...

<http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/ProjectView.aspx?id=200>

Highly commended-Virgin Responsible Tourism awards

SOUTH AFRICA

Emmanuel Advice and Care Centre

This experience I felt would be completely different to my previous experiences as a volunteer and so it was with a sense of excitement that I approached Emmanuel. In a sense this meant that although as a nurse volunteer my focus would be on the carers, I decided that in order to understand the ethos and practicalities of the centre I would try to be involved with as many aspects of Emmanuel as I could; and so I did. My instant impression was that the centre was crying out for help.



The compound is on a dirt road between houses, shacks and rubble; it is a piece of scrub land fenced off with chicken wire. There are 3 obvious structures, a metal container which provides office space and a kitchen, 2 wooden garden sheds, one of which is the crèche the other the carer's space which is also used for various support groups and meetings. There is one outside tap which provides water for washing, cooking, cleaning etc and 1 portable toilet for everyone including the 500+ OVC, s who arrive for a hot meal daily. I was fortunate in having access to a toilet in Norma's house, one of the carer's across the road, and at about 1pm each day when I returned from the field the cry would go up "Where's Norma? Aunty Jean needs the loo" but in less polite terms!!

the centre with portable loo!

Polly, the project director, is quite a character; she is forthright, noisy, laughs a lot and makes it absolutely clear that openness and transparency are of paramount importance. There is a great emphasis on resolving conflict and I had first hand experience of this. A potential disciplinary problem was avoided by all parties sitting down with Polly and airing their views calmly, solutions were explored and the problem resolved with the 3 persons involved apologizing and giving each other a hug. Another issue arose when out in the field, one carer was very rude to another and it soon became clear that an argument was in the offing; the situation was diffused by another carer stepping in and quietly suggesting that the discussion should be deferred until it could be resolved back at the centre with Polly in private. The two people involved agreed, gave each other a hug and the accuser apologised for bringing up the issue in public. It was dealt with later.



Polly and one of her team of carers

There is a monthly meeting when all the carers and other members of the project, e.g. kitchen staff and crèche volunteers get together, there is an agenda and anyone can add to this. This not only serves the purpose of keeping everyone up to date but offers support and guidance for the carers; a sandwich and drink is provided for everyone and this also serves to draw people together and relax a little.

Polly is determined that the carer's will be valued and cared for and to this end she had organised a team building weekend funded partially by the department of social welfare but also by local hoteliers and business people. The weekend was at Plettenberg Bay, it included workshops on self esteem and self awareness, problem solving and resolving conflict and looking at the way forward. I was invited but sadly it was the weekend I was leaving.

Polly also organised a camping weekend for 35 OVC.s, aged between 10 and 14yrs. this was such a treat for the children, there were games organised, they went to the beach, did traditional African dancing, ate 3 wholesome meals a day plus snacks but also had workshops on confidence building, resolving conflict, healthy life styles; the mixture of fun and serious issues proved to be a winner. The camp was a tremendous success, it was a selfless effort by Polly and the team leaders who gave up their weekend, organised the whole programme, cooked all the meals, begged and borrowed bedding, toilet-ries, medicines, food etc. They all came back exhausted and vowed never to do it again (until next time!)

Although there is a strong sense of Christianity and faith it is not overt; prayers and singing are not a set part of the daily routine but praise is never far away and displayed sometimes when least expected; I found this showed a strength and quiet confidence in their faith.



International Rotary had donated 2 new wheel chairs and a few used ones; one afternoon I noticed a woman walking into the compound, she was at least 6ft tall and on her back she was carrying a young man who looked about 20years old, he was taller than she was. It transpired that they had been selected to receive wheel-chairs; this young man had recovered amazingly from TB meningitis but it had left him paralysed from the waist down and his mother carried him everywhere. A few minutes later another woman arrived with a boy on her back, he looked about 16yrs old; he was suffering from cerebral palsy and had never walked. The third woman carried a little boy who looked about 4yrs old; he had bilateral talipes and had been told he would never walk. This was so upsetting as this type



of surgery is routine, and if this child could be operated on and he would be able to walk. I spoke to all 3 mothers who really didn't believe they would get wheelchairs as they had waited so long. I asked permission to take photographs and the results say it all! I did give the families copies of the photos to keep and they were quite happy for me to share them.

There was no plan for a crèche but every day children arrived unannounced and so it became established. There is no shade at Emmanuel and nowhere for the children to play so for most of the day there are 35 children aged 2-5yrs cooped up inside the garden shed. The carers take them in single file to the one toilet and then they all wash their hands under the tap. One day the toilet was deemed so unfit for use that so Nellie took all the children to her home to use her toilet! The children have no toys, just some old scrap paper in a cardboard box (which when we investigated also housed cockroaches and mouse droppings) and ancient wax crayons which were so old and used it was difficult to tell the colours; there were no tables and chairs or floor covering just the rough wood. The 3 volunteers who take care of them do their best, but it worried me that Nellie always carried a long stick!! She assured me she would never hit them but I'm not entirely convinced.



They teach the children songs, encourage them to draw and read them stories; they had 4 books! I saw 3 little girls playing "Mum" cuddling what I thought was a doll until I went closer and found it was an old rag; lovely, imaginative play. I discussed with Polly whether I could look at the crèche facilities and she agreed it needed a clear out and I could do whatever I felt necessary so one morning the crèche staff and I did just that, we swept, mopped and threw away 3 bin bags full of rubbish, it is amazing what people donate e.g. old, incomplete jigsaws meant for adults, broken toys. We rescued anything we thought could be utilised and on finding a bag of dirty soft toys we washed them, kept a few for the crèche and gave each child one to take home, there were some very happy faces as they all went home cuddling their toys. I managed to get hold of some plastic boxes with lids (in an effort to keep the wild life out) new boxes of crayons and colouring books which we took the pages out of and photo copied so there would be enough to go round and kept master copies and salvaged the best of the scrap paper balloons, it was a start. We discussed the quality and appropriateness of some donations and Polly agreed that in future they would only accept good, clean, useful toys etc. I have already been promised some good used toys, hopefully they will materialise.

Emmanuel Projects

Emmanuel is essentially an advice and care centre for HIV/AIDS sufferers; it consists of 3 satellite offices, Kwanakolo, described above, Kleinskool about 15mins drive away where the carers have use of a small room and Booyens Park primary school about 20 mins away. The main focus is the home based carers of which there are about 30 including 3 supervisors and 3 team leaders. Some of the carers are volunteers, others are paid a stipend; some have done the home based carers basic training which focuses on basic nursing skills. The centre is very pro-active, there is a well attended HIV support group, who actually turn up between sessions they enjoy it so much! There is an active elderly support group who knit, sew, do bead work and generally help where they can.



The kitchen supplies hot meals everyday for the OVC, the little ones arrive about 1pm each carrying a plastic dish of some sort and the school children arrive about 3pm. Everyone lends a hand, even Polly, one day I found her in the kitchen with an apron on showing the carers how to make a pasta dish. Creativity is vital as they often do not know from day to day what the menu will be! Sometimes it is rice with spicy mince, mashed potato or mealie pap but the kitchen staff do their best to make it tasty. When the staple food doesn't arrive it is the ubiquitous sandwich to the rescue. I was also impressed by the hygiene standards in the kitchen despite the lack of running water, although finding a cockroach swimming in a cup of coffee is a bit off putting!! The moral of this story is if you are lucky enough to have a cup of anything never leave it unattended!

Polly doing the cooking

The older OVC,s are encouraged to spend time at the centre and Polly hopes to be able to offer more activities for them but the bottom line is there is no space. I was asked by one young man if I would help him with his CV, not my strong point but I did and consequently spent quite a few evenings typing out CV's and job applications ! Perhaps this could be an area where help could be offered in the future.

The Garden

Another new project is the vegetable garden; I met up with a market gardener from Port Alfred, who was starting 3 permaculture gardens, one at each satellite office, with some of the proceeds from the Ubuntu bracelet campaign; she provided seed, plants, trees, 3 wheelbarrows, 3 hosepipes, 3 spades and 3 hoes.

The elderly together with young people from the HIV support group were to work together on the gardens and the day she arrived with the equipment the elders started work, the ground was dug over and the next few days raised beds established; seeds were sown and young vegetables including spinach, carrots, peppers, cabbage and tomatoes were planted. Each garden was given a name by the workers the one at Kwanokolo was named The Garden of Hope and Tommy made a banner which he put over the entrance to the garden. The joy when the first pepper produced (in the space of 3 weeks) fruit was fantastic, we all had to go and see!

I discussed with Terry (the gardener) Polly and Tommy (a local volunteer and DIY expert) my concern that the children had nowhere to play, the outcome was that we got some paving stones and sand, Terry provided 3 peach trees and a mulberry tree for fruit and shade and before I left the trees were planted and the elders had started work clearing the ground for the play area, it will be interesting to see if actually happens!



the garden of hope after 3 weeks



Tommy



Terry with supplies

World TB Day

TB is of course always a topic on the agenda and when Polly, myself and about 34 carers went to visit a very ill colleague; I soon realized that TB education must be on going. The woman was obviously seriously ill, she had been moved away from her local community to a site where she had been offered a new government house; there were no roads, schools, shops or clinic so she was completely isolated; the house was not ready and so she was given a shack to live in. This shack consisted of one small room, no electricity, running water or sewage system: the woman was lying on her bed unable to walk, she was clearly end stage Aids and more than likely TB, this was indeed confirmed at a later date.



The testing and treatment of TB and supervision of medicines by the DOTS programme is excellent in S.Africa but the issue of avoiding potentially difficult situations has not yet filtered through. TB is killed by the sun and blown away by the wind so I took this opportunity to stress these points and that without compromising the care of the patient we must also care for the carers and ourselves by avoiding overcrowded situations, by opening windows and doors and letting the light and fresh air in.

It was fortuitous in a way that while I was there it was World TB day and Polly asked me if I would be involved in planning a programme for the local community. I thought this a great opportunity We would involve the local school by asking the children to produce a poster about TB and there would be prizes for the best. We would blow up 150 balloons and tie them in groups of 5 and write on them "To Be Aware", "To be Tested", "To Be Treated", "To Be Cured", "To Be Safe", and working closely with Sr Sarah Jacobs, a community sister, this is what we did. Polly, Sarah and I targeted the local ANC counsellor and he agreed to provide the community hall for free, he would arrange for it to be decorated and would provide refreshments, this I might add was due to Polly charming the pants off him!!! The day was excellent, all the carers, including Polly, Sarah and me, wore new blue polo shirts provided by my local Rotary International committee, the words Project Emmanuel embroidered on, and we really looked and felt like a team.

One young boy Zolani, wrote a poem called "TB the Killer "which a young girl read out. The crunch came when Polly told me at the last minute that I was a guest speaker and incidentally would I cover MDR and XDR TB!!

The hall was full of local people, school children, different dignitaries and community nurses, I was the only white face, but I was made so welcome by everyone. We judged the drawings and presented the prizes for the best 3 but in fact all the children were given a little prize. At the end of the proceedings everyone in the hall was given a sandwich, a piece of fruit and a cool drink as promised by the local counsellor and then we let the balloons go outside. Of course I haven't mentioned hitching a ride in the baakie (truck) with 150 balloons in the back held by a dozen carers or physically emptying the truck of bricks before we could get in!!! For me the lasting impression was that the whole community had come together to support the initiative including the local counsellors, department of Health, department of Social Welfare and the schools; quite an achievement and it was all down to Polly's amazing organizational skills.



I don't know where the time went, there is so much to do and so few resources, I'm not sure when I will go back but I will .

Jean Eaton

AFTER SAMATA

IT is true to say that since returning from Samata School in Kathmandu I have been plotting to return as soon as my legs and finances will allow. Meanwhile I've been boring for England, telling everyone about the marvellous work of the incredibly inspirational Uttam, the calmer and resourceful Binod and the love and affection poured on this serial grandfather by children I cannot, nor would wish to, forget.

My family has been subjected to countless stories and photographs and to my surprise they have asked for more. They feel a particular affinity towards the school as they were able to finance the fitting out of an eight-bed dormitory by declining Christmas gifts (and denying me the same!) so there was a reasonable pot of money to spend on necessities for the school and its children.



Living as I do in a rural area there is the opportunity to talk to village groups who are always on the lookout for speakers for their monthly meetings. I have done half a dozen, from the First Wednesday Club (formerly known as the Over 60s, but some members being slightly vain, wanted the name changed to preserve their status as mature sex symbols), the Ladies Group (slightly younger mature sex symbols who gave me a generous fee that was sent to the school and is being used to help pay for a water purifying plant), the local school, the British Legion branch and a couple of Women's Institutes – and more of these are booked even as far ahead as mid-2010.

One of the most pleasing outcomes of a talk followed the visit to a local school who are planning a geography project in the summer term: the subject Nepal, and in particular comparing their lot with the children of that mountain country. Needless to say, the children here are nicking my photographs, but if it spreads the word, who cares?

I am frequently stopped in Oxford and asked if I have heard from anyone at the school since my return. I had used my column in an evening newspaper to tell of my adventures. I can tell them I have – and when an email arrives it makes even the gloomiest day brighter.

To be asked by children whom I was with for only four short weeks when I was planning to return is wonderful. I don't know what I was able to give to the children apart from affection and a little help with their English (albeit with a Yorkshire accent) but whatever it was, it was minute at the side of what they gave me. I tell people that to be greeted with a hearty thumbs up or 'high fives' by children as young as four, all wearing those broad Nepalese smiles, is something I can never forget. To be taken into the confidence of mid-teenagers was humbling.

Finally, to show people the lemon scarf of friendship that was draped around my neck in front of the entire school by a three-year-old girl who had 'adopted' me makes the tears flow as they had on that day in late December.

Well I warned you I can bore for England.

Peter

Note from ed.

Peter started the student newsletter at Samata and the second one has now been produced. The students have written this themselves and Peter together with another volunteer have helped publish it. When Sallie visited Samata the students told her how special it was that they can now write about themselves. Well done Peter! If you would like a copy please email us at newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk



Sallie`s travels to India and Nepal

I have just returned from a month in India and Nepal. I returned with serious luggage problems – well that’s not strictly true – but if all the love and good wishes sent to Naxal volunteers were to be weighed in kilos or pounds they would not have let me on the plane. All of you were mentioned by name by someone at Naxal – either a child, one of the staff or a board member.



It’s now just over a year since we started working with Naxal – and it’s been challenging. Until recently some volunteers felt strongly that their professional skills were not respected or welcomed at Naxal. This was not true – the board and the staff simply did not know how to use skills such as those brought by the volunteers. This trip I saw real differences. The staff and board at Naxal now realize that volunteers are truly there to serve and not to criticize without reason – it is the team work of previous volunteers (i.e. each and all of you!) that has built this platform. The teachers are engaging with the education and play therapy volunteers and Reema and the didis were completely engaged by the input of the doctor and a paediatric nurse who were there during my visit. Hygiene was their number one priority and there has been much cleaning and toilet training and I have just heard post my return from Haribol and he assures me that this work will be built on – I suspect it will need constant reinforcement by future volunteers.



This visit I was particularly struck by the amount of children’s work displayed on the walls and the number of toys that were out and being played with by the children. When we first started work at Naxal the only entertainment for the children was the TV (on the rare occasions when there was electricity, of course!). On both the visits I made to Naxal this trip it was not on! The children were playing together with balls and toys and the didis were joining in.

Most of the children were laughing and boisterous but as usual there were a few, including Lucky, who kept to themselves and sat quietly against the wall. Naxal are still working on the idea of engaging with local counselling skills – but they find it daunting and very costly – Kate is working with future volunteers with counselling skills to see if they can help move this along – this is now actively welcomed by Naxal.

The building is still in need of a lot of work and there is good news and bad news. The bad news – the board are years away from finding alternative accommodation that they can buy – land is the problem. The good news – they are now prepared to invest in real repairs at the current Naxal building. Roofs were being repaired whilst I was there – the current volunteers had convinced them to spend a big chunk of money on plumbing and next.....a room is being decorated and prepared for the older children.

It should be finished in the next couple of weeks. This will be the older children’s room where the computers will be. Their DVD and CD player will also be there – the goal is to have internet connection too.

Bijaya is soon to go on maternity leave and it is unclear whether she will return. On one of my visits I was there just as the children were returning from school – then it got really noisy! All of them were calling out volunteer names – all of them were singing songs they had been taught or wanted me to hear them reading in English.

I am very blessed – I am able to visit projects such as Naxal and see the difference the volunteer programme makes over time – how small changes build up to real change. The work that volunteers are doing now would not have been possible without the input of previous volunteers – the work of future volunteers will build on that work. Kate and I appreciate that it is often difficult for volunteers to see the change they are bringing about. I want to assure you that your time at Naxal was worthwhile and will be worthwhile and that as a team you are bringing meaningful change. Thank you.

And finally on a light hearted but “weird note”

I was standing outside New Delhi airport – having a quick cigarette before my flight to Kathmandu (yes I’m a smoker I’m afraid) and a woman “of a certain age” approached me and said, “oh good you are having a cigarette may I join you” ?

Conversation opened with the usual “are you on holiday”? – “No I’m working I said”

“Are you on holiday”?, I asked –

“No I was volunteering for a month in Nepal and I’ve just come to India for a few days break”

“With whom were you volunteering” ?

“At an orphanage in Kathmandu ”

“With which organisation”?

“OCCED” came the reply

“So who organised your placement”? I asked

“A wonderful organisation called *people and places*” came the reply!

“I’m Sallie from *people and places*” I said

What a small world! I shan’t name the volunteer just in case her mother doesn’t know she smokes yet!



Uttam and Bhaktapur principal

There is even a water purifier...with another one on it's way very soon, which means there will be clean drinking water for all the children. The library is open and in use and with prompting from volunteers it is clean, tidy and organised and it is becoming better stocked by the day. Children and staff are using it. There was no – yes, I mean no - rubbish on the floor – the bins provided by volunteers are being well used.

There is now a computer at Samata Niketan and as of the end of this month there will be a printer – it's placed in the volunteer room, so there is enough space for volunteers to work with teachers and students to help them with IT. The newsletter can be produced by the children themselves – this is such an exciting development for all at Samata – let's hope that dust does not become too much of a problem!

Many of these improvements could not have happened without the generosity of volunteers.

Uttam asked me to personally thank each and every one of you – and he could name you!

Uttam has always been keen to offer education to as many children as possible – he is now beginning to embrace the idea of excellence of education and the need to improve classroom conditions if this is to be a reality.

This major change in his thinking is, in large part, due to all his conversations with previous volunteers....and even pressure from some of his teachers. He is now addressing class sizes – slowly!



The last 16 months have seen nearly 40 volunteers at Samata Niketan – at first there was little engagement by any of the teachers with the volunteers. This trip, I saw for myself the interaction between teachers and volunteers.

Teachers are chatting with volunteers in their breaks, some teachers are now engaging with volunteers in the classroom. It has taken a long time to build the trust needed to encourage the teachers to engage – many of them (some still do) felt threatened by the volunteer programme – now a sizeable and important minority is trusting the volunteers. Natural Nepali reserve was always going to make the capacity building a slow process, but it is happening.

Chalk and talk and rote are still the chosen path but local teachers are beginning to adopt small techniques learnt from the volunteers.

I talked to many of the children – again all of them asked me to say hello to named volunteers – as you know the vast majority of them are desperate to learn and particularly from the volunteers – who share their lives with them. The older students particularly asked me to thank those of you who have helped them produce their newsletter.

A major success for me was getting Uttam to understand that the volunteers need more information before they come. He has already sent, via Nima, some examples of exam papers – he is going to try to furnish us with at least the English curriculum.



Due to the wonderful support by volunteers for Samata Niketan we are now going to extend the volunteer programme to two more of Uttam's schools within the Kathmandu valley – we will start at Samata Bhaktapur about 12 kms outside Kathmandu and then when that is well supported we will place volunteers at Samata Patan. Many volunteers have visited these schools and I hope they will agree that support here will be worthwhile. Bhaktapur even has a rudimentary computer room but no internet as yet – we hope to be able to facilitate this once there is a phone line – but being Nepal we can't be sure when that will be!

These 3 schools educate over 4000 children at any one time with nearly double that number on the school roll.

We will work with the 3 Samata schools as we do with the schools programme in South Africa – the schools and the local team will decide which school will receive which volunteers, depending on their skills and to maintain a sustainable volunteer input.

Exam dates and festivals continue to be a challenge and frustration for the volunteers and Kate. This trip I arrived just after the government resigned – all was peaceful – I do so hope that it stays that way – those I talked to in Nepal believe that there will not be violence as such but the political mess will cause any development there might have been in Nepal to be even slower.

And from Uttam – “We remember every volunteer, they are in our prayers and we thank them for helping us make a better life for the children”

Sallie`s trip to India.

We have wanted to work in India for some time. We have even known who we wanted to work with. A wonderful husband and wife team who own a travel company based in New Delhi, Mandip and Anita Singh. They have been in responsible travel for 30 years. Mandip is an inspirational adventurer who has enabled many travellers to share his love of some of the most beautiful spots on our planet take a look at... www.ibexexpeditions.com



Anita and Mandip have wanted to wait to work on the volunteer programme until this year because Mandip has been very involved in launching the Ecotourism Society of India – that’s done and now they are ready. So I got on an airplane at the end of April.



Deogarh Mahal

Now this is just about the hottest time of the year....but I must say that because it’s a dry heat in Rajasthan at that time of year I didn’t have too much of a problem.

The first projects we will work with are in Rajasthan – and yes it’s all that that word conjures up – the land of warriors and bright colours and awe inspiring forts and palaces.

Volunteers, after spending a night in New Delhi and having their initial orientation with Ibex will travel by train to Jaipur and then drive through the countryside of Rajasthan for 5 hours...and wait for it they will stay at the Deogarh Mahal...an 18th century palace of the Rawat (equivalent of Raja). See <http://www.deogarhmahal.com/castle.htm>



Primary school



Sallie with Devider

So this volunteer experience is for those of us that like our luxury but still want to be of service to an economically poor community. The palace is smack bang in the centre of Deogarh - a town of about 40,000 with another 10 to 15,000 in the nearby villages. It’s in one of the villages Chitaradi where the education volunteers will work with the primary school. Devider Singh is a modest gentle man with a real sparkle in his eyes – and what he is achieving for his children is humbling. He cares for 160 children with 4 teachers and no books or paper or even desks and chairs – except those provided by the Rawat family trust. 3 of the 5 classrooms now have desks and benches. take a look at <http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/ProjectView.aspx?id=205> to find out more.

I also visited the local hospital – it cares for 50,000 people - there are 3 doctors and 7 nurses. The details of that project are being finalised but they are very keen to recruit general and paediatric nurse volunteers initially.

The Rawat and his family will be your hosts in Deogarh – the volunteers will work with projects already supported by their family trust. They are such warm and generous people and the 4 days I spent with them showed me how seriously they take their responsibility to their community.....and the palace is drop dead gorgeous....the town of Deogarh is charming – and after only two days there I was being greeted as a friend. It’s not a hugely touristy area so you will experience real India but in a friendly and safe small town.