



## General Rules and Guidelines for International Volunteers at Maher

(With effect from January 2018)

We at Maher are thankful to all our international volunteers who have come here from far away to express their support for Maher's cause and to work to strengthen it further. We wish your stay in India to be both enjoyable and rewarding, and are sure that it will ever be a pleasant memory for you to remember in years to come.

To help facilitate a positive stay with Maher, this information package will address the following topics:

- Materials required before your arrival
- Guidelines for integrating with Maher and the local communities
- Packing suggestions
- Logistics, rules, and regulations of your stay
- Possible activities and work during your stay at Maher
- Contact information
- Accommodation request and questionnaire

Thank you for giving your time and talents to Maher. We look forward to your visit!

Warm regards,

Sr. Lucy and the Maher staff

## **Required before Arrival:**

**Please note due to water shortages and extreme heat, we are unable to accommodate guests in the summer months of March, April and May. Kindly plan your visit accordingly.**

## **Visa application:**

We request you to apply for a tourist visa. Your application should not include any information about your volunteering with Maher for you may be asked by the concerned authorities to apply for a work/employment visa. Kindly note that due to prevailing government regulations and tax implications, Maher cannot employ you as a staff member. As you will be an unpaid volunteer with Maher, it is not possible for Maher to provide you with the required documentation to obtain a work visa. Issue of a work visa also requires police inquiry.

Please state the purpose of your visit to be tourism/sightseeing and a visit to Maher.

## **Documents to be submitted to Maher before your arrival:**

Kindly submit by email the following documents to Maher before you arrive in India:

1. A photocopy of your passport and visa
2. An application requesting accommodation at Maher. The application should include
  - a. Full contact details of the contact person (name, postal address, phone and e-mail) whom Maher would contact in the case of an emergency like sickness or accident (Please see example application form attached)
  - b. Details of your arrival and departure
  - c. Dates of your stay at Maher.

## **Sensitivity to the Local Community**

Maher started its work in 1997 at Vadhu Budruk, a small village about 30 km from Pune. It wasn't easy for Maher to gain acceptance with the local population and authorities who customarily questioned its religious and financial motives. However, we feel that our transparent and sincere way of working for the disadvantaged gradually earned their respect and trust.

We look upon our international volunteers as our own extension and would therefore like to request them to keep this perspective in mind and maintain a demeanor that does not offend local customs and sensitivities. This means modest dress and behaviour when in the villages surrounding Maher.

There is a deeply ingrained cultural concept in India that the "Guest is King." This means that the people you are living with may not allow you to help with the cleaning, or even to do your own dishes. This can be difficult to adjust to for volunteers who have come with a mindset of service. Please realise that it is our cultural way of welcoming a guest and thanking them for coming, in the same way that you would bring out the best for a guest in your home. Release any expectations you may have, and allow the cultural

circumstances. As always, if you are ever uncomfortable or don't understand something, please speak with the person in charge of your centre.

### **Packing Suggestions**

#### **Clothing:**

Dressing modestly is considered respectful in India for both men and women, so both genders should avoid sleeveless tops, shorts, miniskirts, and anything skimpy, see-through, or tight. Keep two adverbs in mind: dress comfortably and respectfully.

The traditional "Salwar-Kameez" for girls is the most appropriate dress that will not offend any community. For men, trousers and T-shirts or shirts are appropriate, though the "Kurta-Pyjama" will be more accepted and appreciated. Jeans are overly heavy and hot. There are some second-hand Indian clothes available at Maher that you can borrow upon arrival, if required.

Clothes in India are very beautiful and inexpensive and shopping trips can be arranged once you arrive. Tall people should be aware that when buying trousers in India, it will be nearly impossible to find legs long enough. Either pack accordingly, or be ready to bare your ankles.

Light shoes that can be easily slipped on and off are ideal for work around Maher. Shoes are taken off at the entrance to most buildings.

#### **Food and medicines:**

The food at Maher and its centers will be basic Indian meals, generally vegetarian. The food may be spicy for those visiting India for the first time, so it would be advisable to bring along some durable supplements (energy bars, soup cubes, dry fruits, etc.) if you desire.

There is no guarantee that drinking water in most places is treated. You should therefore purchase processed bottled water while you are at Maher. A bottle of water will cost you between Rs. 12/- and Rs. 20/- and boxes of 12 bottles can be ordered for Rs. 100/-. When buying water from shops, make sure that the bottle is sealed.

Maher's main centre in Vadhu is quite rural. Trips into the city to visit doctors or pharmacies are easily arranged, but it is advisable that you travel with a full supply of any prescription medications you require. Some people have problems in adapting to the local food, so it is recommended to bring medicine against diarrhoea.

Be sure to visit your doctor before your visit to discuss appropriate vaccinations.

#### **Additional Information:**

Mosquitoes are simply a fact of life in India. Most facilities of Maher provide mosquito netting for the beds, but you may wish to bring your own (a single net for a single bed). It is also highly advisable that you travel with a strong insect repellent for the early morning and evening hours.

Pack specifically for the season in which you are visiting. If your stay falls during the monsoon (roughly June-

October) a rain coat is advisable. The winter months (Nov/Dec/Jan) can be fairly chilly at night, but always get quite hot during the day. And please be aware we are unable to accommodate guests in March, April and May because of extreme heat and water shortages.

Basic toiletries are easily accessible and much cheaper in India than in most Western countries. If, however, you are attached to a specific brand it is unlikely you will find it here. Hand sanitizer is recommended. Sanitary napkins are easily available for women, but tampons are quite uncommon in India, so would need to be brought with you.

Indian toilets have water for cleaning. Maher centres have some toilet paper, and it is available for purchase at nearby shops. It is advisable to take some toilet paper with you when travelling elsewhere in India, if you require it.

Towels and bedding (sheets, a pillow, and a blanket) are provided.

If you wish to have internet access during your stay it is highly advisable that you pack your own means of accessing the web, whether that be a laptop, smart phone, or tablet. The Vadhu office does have internet, but it is available to volunteers strictly for Maher related work or emergencies. There are several cyber cafes in Koregaon Bhima (a nearby town), but these can have very patchy connections and can be difficult to access. Easiest is to purchase an Indian SIM card with a data plan for your own device, or to obtain a USB 3G dongle for your laptop. This will ensure that you have reliable personal internet access. Prices for data plans in India are very affordable. Simply inquire about internet upon your arrival. Laws in India make it very complicated for foreigners to obtain a SIM, so likely someone at Maher will do it for you in their name. This process may take some time, so please be patient.

For more delicate electronic devices you will need to bring not only an adaptor, but also a surge protector. Electricity is unreliable and can easily fry a laptop. Surge protectors are the same price in India compared to the US or Europe.

And remember- most things you might need will be available here. It just may take a bit of time to arrange a trip to the city to obtain it.

### **Logistics, Rules and Regulations**

#### **Accommodation:**

Maher has limited space for its women and children and this applies to the visitors as well. You are requested to adjust to “Group Living” and may need to use Indian style toilets when a western one is not available. The rooms are basic, with single beds and a ceiling fan for cooling. Some bathrooms have electric water heaters or there may be solar heated water available later in the day. A ‘bath’ / shower may involve using a bucket and pouring the water from it over you with a mug! Depending on the center and room in which you stay you may have to share a bathroom with other volunteers.

Volunteers often enjoy walking to the nearby village of Koregaon Bhima for some small shops and fruit stands. However, please be advised it is nearly impossible to find a rickshaw back to the Maher centre in Vadhu past 6pm, and it is dangerous to walk home alone after dark. So we request you only make these trips during the daytime hours, and please always inform a Maher staff member when you are going out.

**Costs:**

Accommodation and three meals a day: Rs. 400 /- per person. Please note this cost excludes bottled water. If you leave Maher for a few days your room is booked for you, hence the charge during your absence is Rs. 100 /- per day.

**Airport/railway station transportation costs:**

Transfer to Vadhu (Maher main centre) from Mumbai Airport by road will cost Rs. 4,200 per trip and from Pune Airport/Railway station Rs. 600 per trip in Maher's vehicle. If you use a taxi it will cost you a little more. You can also request K.K. Travels Pune, India ([www.kktravels.com](http://www.kktravels.com)) to pick you up from Mumbai airport and bring you to Maher. This journey with KK Travels costs Rs 850 per person and will be in a shared taxi. Please be sure to contact us to coordinate your arrival and let us know what you've decided and when you will arrive. We will also need your flight details.

**Transportation:**

If you wish to visit Pune there are local rickshaws available from Vadhu/Koregaon Bhima. Easier is to discuss your wishes with the staff and to get a ride with the Maher vehicle on its daily trip into Pune. If you are riding with the vehicle on a route they are taking anyway, there is no added cost.

For larger groups of visitors wishing to visit, Maher has a bus that can seat up to 32 people. The cost of renting this bus (with driver) to collect a group from Mumbai airport is a flat rate of Rs 17,000, which includes the Rs 1000 cost for the permit to park our bus at the airport.

**Working day/hours:**

Volunteers will work 8 hours a day. Often this is split into morning and evening sessions as the children are off to school in the afternoons, but each schedule will be unique according to your work in Maher.

While at Maher, please follow the timetable so as not to cause inconvenience to the kitchen staff and the other staff of Maher. In most sites breakfast is at 08:00, lunch at 13:00 and dinner at 20:00, but this may vary if there are events/programmes planned on a particular day.

There may not be specified days off in the week, as this work is truly 24/7. Please maintain the schedule you need to remain at your best working condition, and never hesitate to ask to take a few days of rest.

**Rules and regulations:**

The consumption of tobacco and alcohol is totally forbidden in the institution as well as in the surrounding villages. There are nearly 850 children in Maher and we feel that our guests set a good example for them by not consuming tobacco and alcohol. Furthermore, the community in the surrounding villages is generally quite conservative when it comes to such substances. Foreigners seen purchasing alcohol and tobacco locally are known to be Maher volunteers, and this reflects poorly on Maher.

Since Maher receives requests from volunteers and visitors all year round, we prefer our volunteers limit their stay to three months. However, if a particular student volunteer requires longer period for educational purpose from his/her university, Maher will consider the request on merit. Due to water

shortages and extreme heat, we ask volunteers to refrain from coming in March, April and May. We appreciate your kind cooperation.

If you visit the city, please return to Maher by 6pm. Public transport is not reliable, and it is difficult to find rickshaws after 6pm from Koregaon Bhima (the nearest town on the highway) to Maher. It is not advisable for women to be on the road after dark.

Do not entertain women or children in your room, but rather in the public spaces.

Please do not accept any food, sweets, herbal remedies, or similar from residents, even if this is in a sealed packet.

Try to be community-centered and please do not entertain a particular child or woman with gifts or outings. Similarly please do not privately screen movies for select groups of children on your laptop, etc. Movies need to be approved before viewing and should be screened in designated communal areas where everyone can take part.

Please avoid correspondence or phone calls to any single woman or child. Special treatment of certain individuals can create jealousy among the residents. Similarly do not lend or rent out your phone to any of the residents as this has led to unwholesome telephone calls in the past.

Please do not give money to individual staff members. If any staff members approach you asking for payments that are unrelated to your Rs 400/- daily contribution then please take this up with the managerial team.

Please never attempt to discipline a child at Maher. If you are concerned with a child's behavior (or a resident's or staff member's) please discuss the concern with the Maher managers. Maher works delicately with children who have had a lot of trauma and challenges in life, so it is important the all volunteers and guests follow this rule.

Please come ready to live closely with people from all over the world. By this we mean not only the Maher community, but also the other guests and volunteers from around the world. We all must maintain good attitudes to get along well with one another, and to keep a feeling of peace, welcoming and friendliness among the international community. This also sets the best example for the children of Maher.

For any official payment or donation you make to Maher you will receive a receipt. Please keep hold of these.

## **Activities for volunteers**

### **Section 1: Activities for ALL volunteers (of any mother-tongue but who have a basic understanding of English, Marathi, Hindi, Malayalam or Bengali)**

#### **Work with children and women.**

Depending on a volunteer's skills this might include:

- Teaching basic new language skills to the women and children.

- Conducting educational games with the children and go on walks with them.
- Helping the children with their homework and creating covers for their school books.
- Teaching children's songs, various dance styles such as folk, classical, etc., and music and musical instruments such as the guitar, keyboard, tabla, harmonica, harmonium, etc.
- Organizing arts and crafts sessions with the women/children, e.g. helping in the production unit or making various handicrafts from waste materials.
- Teaching basic IT skills e.g. how to search for information on the internet, back up information, send and email, etc., as well as how to take photographs.
- Helping with personal grooming (cutting nails, trimming and cutting hair, etc.)
- Teaching the preparation of different sweets.
- Playing with children, giving them encouragement.

Support work in the office might include:

- General administrative support including data entry and software support.
- Writing reports and newsletter articles (mostly in either Marathi, Hindi or English)
- Translating foreign-language communications about Maher into English or vice versa.
- Collecting statistical data about women and children and writing up individual case studies.
- Logging and updating information about the different Maher centers.
- Maintaining the Maher website.
- Updating Maher's Facebook page with news and imagery.
- Helping to make photo albums and digital brochures to print.
- Making short films about Maher and uploading them to YouTube and social media
- Finding sales points for Maher products online, in stores, or at events.

Other support work might include:

- Helping to make bags, cards, and candles in the production unit and pricing sales.
- Assisting the promotion and sale of Maher products at a Maher stall at events.
- Decorating walls with murals and pictures by the children.
- Light cooking and/or food preparation with the housemothers.
- Light gardening and maintenance of the buildings and grounds.

**Section 2: Suggested activities for volunteers who are fluent in either Marathi, Hindi, Malayalam or Bengali (respective to location):**

- Accompanying the women and children on hospital visits.
- Organizing picnics and cultural excursions and accompanying the women and children.
- Responding to written enquiries in Marathi/Hindi on behalf of Maher.
- Translating English communications about Maher into a respective Indian language.
- Shopping locally for products and materials used in the production unit.
- Assisting the housemothers with more advanced cooking or similar daily activities that require a strong vocabulary.
- Finding new national donors for Maher

**Section 3: Suggested activities for English mother-tongue volunteers might include:**

- Teaching intermediate English to the women and children.
- Helping any Maher students enrolled at English medium schools with their studies.
- Writing grant applications on behalf of Maher.
- Responding to written enquiries in English on behalf of Maher.
- Proof reading word documents before print.
- Corresponding with international Friends of Maher and new contacts.
- Finding new international donors for Maher.

### **Suggestions for things to bring for the women and children**

- Children's books with simple words
- Simple jigsaw puzzles
- CDs of nursery rhymes and songs for children
- Traditional sweets
- Photos of your home town, family, etc. to show the women and children
- Monetary donations that the staff can use to buy items for the women and children

Bear in mind that a lot of items e.g. pens, paper, and so forth are usually much cheaper to purchase in India than abroad.

### **Tips for being a successful volunteer**

- Try to match your particular set of skills to Maher's needs. Then you will not only enjoy your time here but you will also be the most useful you can be.
- Stay flexible and open-minded.
- Embrace the simplicity of spending focused time with the women, men, and children of Maher. This mindset will not only help you discover how best to offer your skills to Maher, it will also enable you to form a personal relationship with the Maher community.
- Be prepared to learn, and not only to give.
- Don't come with the expectation that you can change the world in 3 months, but remember that your contribution can be valuable and effective nonetheless.
- Most importantly: allow yourself space and time to be a positive member of the Maher community.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions before your arrival please do not hesitate to contact the Maher office at [maher@maherashram.org](mailto:maher@maherashram.org) / [maherpune@gmail.com](mailto:maherpune@gmail.com) or +91 9011086134/+91 9422006065/+9120-27033421.

Our office hours are 9:30-5:30 Monday-Saturday



Maher's main centre is located at:

Maher, Vadhu Budruk, Koregaon Bhima, Tal. Shirur, Dist. Pune - 412216, Maharashtra

If you have questions you would like answered by other foreign volunteers that have previously visited Maher and return regularly, please contact either Katie Norman at [kenorman6@gmail.com](mailto:kenorman6@gmail.com), or Mikaela Keepin at [mikaelakeepin@gmail.com](mailto:mikaelakeepin@gmail.com). They would be happy to help answer your questions.

### **Final Notes**

Please try to give your best while you are at Maher. Come prepared to spend your time talking and interacting with the people rather than doing work for them. Most importantly: allow yourself space and time to simply be a positive member of the Maher community. It can be difficult to adjust to the pace of life and work at Maher. Western culture is largely preoccupied with an idea of work leading to immediate and tangible results. Allow yourself to embrace the simplicity of just spending focused time with the women, men, and children of Maher. This mindset will not only allow you to find the avenues for you to best offer your gifts and talents to Maher, it will also enable you to form a personal relationship with this family. Flexibility and openness are key.

If at times you find interaction with the staff rather difficult, do not get disheartened or feel that you are not welcome. The staff is used to a good number of international volunteers around working for Maher and they may not know your specific needs unless you tell them. Feel free to do so. Misunderstandings and unclearness can lead to many unnecessary hurt feelings. When you arrive you will be introduced to the person in charge of the house where you will be staying. Adjusting to a new country and community is challenging; if any issues arise please do not hesitate to discuss them.

In order to get the maximum learning from your stay at Maher, we recommend you to keep a personal diary.

We wish you a comfortable, fruitful stay in Maher, for you are part of Maher family and we are happy to have you with us. Please let us know if you have any questions regarding your stay.

Warm regards,

Sr. Lucy Kurien  
Founder Director, Maher

## Example application form for accommodation

Name : XXXXXX

Address Line 1 :

Address Line 2 :

Date :

Dear Sister Lucy,

I will be a volunteer at Maher from **Day Month 20\_\_** (start date) until **Day Month 20\_\_** (end date). Kindly provide me with accommodation during my stay. I will keep you informed of any changes in my plans or of my absence from Maher at any time during this period.

I have read and understood the '**General Rules and Guidelines for International Volunteers at Maher** and will sincerely abide by them.

In case of emergency, please contact the following person:

NAME: xxxxxxxxxxxx

RELATIONSHIP TO YOU:

ADDRESS LINE 1:

ADDRESS LINE 2:

CITY:

STATE / COUNTY:

COUNTRY:

EMAIL ADDRESS: e.g. [xxxxxxxxxx@gmail.com](mailto:xxxxxxxxxx@gmail.com)

CONTACT NUMBERS: Landline:

Mobile:

Work:

Yours faithfully,

XXXXXXXXXX

## MAHER VOLUNTEER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please provide the following personal details, proposed length of stay and information about your educational qualifications / interests so we can provide the most appropriate location and work for you during your stay.

### PERSONAL DETAILS

Name	
Address	
City	
State	
ZIP / Postal code	
Country	
Sex	
Email address	
Phone number	(work / home/mobile)
Date form submitted	

### PROPOSED STAY AT MAHER

Start date	
End date	
How did you hear about Maher? Who referred you to us?	
What is the purpose of your visit to Maher?	
Preferred location	

Note- If you are a student and this visit will form part of your studies please indicate any aspects of Maher's work that you would like to be involved with during your stay.

**QUALIFICATIONS / INTEREST – please mention any relevant information that you think will be beneficial to Maher during your stay**

Qualifications / experience	
Hobbies / interests / skills	