

## **Sudan Volunteer Programme: Questions & Answers**

### **What are SVP's aims?**

SVP is a charity whose object is the teaching of English in Sudan, the biggest country in Africa. English language is increasingly recognised there as a key component of business and development. While many Sudanese have received formal instruction in English grammar they have had no experience of hearing a native English speaker or lack the confidence to speak the language in ordinary conversation. The teaching they have received may not be of the best quality, either. Most SVP volunteers work with students in universities where our informal approach has best results. SVP where possible arranges for volunteers to fly together in small groups several times a year, though often individuals go by themselves.

### **What will a spell of volunteering do for me?**

SVP offers you one of the best ways of finding out about life and work in a wonderfully friendly and hospitable country which is both African and Middle Eastern. You have a chance to meet and help young people, many of them displaced from other parts of Sudan. Work with SVP provides a worthwhile career break between jobs and has initiated and extended careers in teaching. Some returned volunteers have successfully found jobs in finance and law and also in government service. If you are retired from teaching your skills and experience will be particularly welcome. Age is not a barrier but you must be fit

### **What about the war in Sudan?**

Wars have devastated large parts of Sudan and led to great suffering and loss of life. Many people have been displaced and have come to live in and around Khartoum which is peaceful and safe. Our volunteers have been particularly welcomed and SVP has some contacts and opportunities for work during spare time with displaced children.

### **How will I fit in?**

SVP is looking for people of both sexes and of all ages above 22 who are native speakers of English, or who have near native ability, with a good general education, as well as those with more specialized qualifications and experience. If you are enthusiastic about the idea of teaching English, are patient, tenacious and good humored, SVP may well be for you.

### **How is SVP organized in Sudan?**

SVP has a sister organization SVP Sudan which is a local voluntary society with Sudanese membership. It works with colleges and universities and the Ministry of Higher Education to arrange placements. The contacts for SVP Sudan are Dr Badreldin Omer El Haj Musa and Mr Mumin Mukhayer on your contact list.

### **How long should I go for?**

Getting settled in and organizing classes takes time as does effective teaching so SVP likes people to volunteer for a minimum of 6 months plus or 9 months for non experienced teachers, to coincide with the academic year of approximately 9 months.

### **What if I haven't taught before?**

You will get an opportunity to learn about teaching by joining Sudanese or other volunteers already at work in the classroom, but do try to do as much preparation as you can before you leave, gathering resources, materials and ideas and bringing books. It

helps to get some of the ideas of TEFL methods which are well explained in *The English Language Teacher's Handbook* by Joanna Baker & Heather Westrup (published by VSO), take Geoffrey Leech *English Grammar A to Z* and Jim Wingate *Getting Beginners to Talk*, and *Lessons from Nothing* by Bruce Marsland (Cambridge).

Also talk to any TEFL teachers and ask to sit in to observe their classes: some teachers have recommended: *Practical techniques for language Teaching* M Lewis and J Hill (1992 Language Teaching Publications), *Learning Teaching* by Jim Scrivener (Heinemann, 1994), and *Teaching by Principles* by H Douglas Brown.

For new teachers the most useful thing is to have a really good coursebook to work from, **with the teachers' books as support**. good supplementary materials like Jill Hadfield's *Communication Games* are invaluable, especially if you want to start planning your own lessons with a task-based approach, as material from such sources can save a lot of planning and preparation time.

### **What do I need before I travel?**

Your passport should be valid for one year from the date of travel. If your stay in Sudan is longer, then your passport should be valid for the whole period you will be away from the UK. SVP will need your passport details 6 weeks before departure to make the entry permit application for you. When you get to Sudan check that you are registered and the extension of validity of your visa is done in good time. This is done through the SVP office in Khartoum.

### **Medical?**

You must get your doctor or medical adviser to send SVP the fitness and inoculation report to show that you are fit and have received the appropriate inoculations (including hepatitis, typhoid, tetanus, polio and meningitis). You should check that you are tolerant of and have been recommended a course of anti-malarial prophylactic. The most effective is Lariam (also called Mefloquine) but it has side effects with some people. The recommended alternatives for use in Sudan are Doxycycline or Malarone. Malarone is not available in Sudan. Doxycycline costs a dollar for 10 day course. There has been some scepticism by doctors in Sudan over the effectiveness of Doxycycline and some people find that their skin becomes very sensitive to the sun. However, it's a great barrier against bugs generally and worth taking for an initial period in any case. Read for yourself the advice given on the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine's website <http://www.malaria-reference.co.uk>

The most important part of preventing malaria is trying not to get bitten. By taking care, you are unlikely to catch malaria: bring with you an impregnated mosquito net plus DEET or 'Jungle Formula' (available from Boots) insect repellent and use them both. Try to maintain a high intake of garlic and apparently the less sugar you eat the better. Be especially vigilant about using your net in the rainy season. Most volunteers favour a generously sized box type net which you can hold up with sticks at the corners of the bed if you haven't got ceiling hooks. There tends to be plenty of bamboo sticks available for this but if you want to take your own then four light wood stakes of about 15mm square section each 110cm long plus two cross pieces 80cm long all with rounded ends to avoid snagging the net are recommended. Take 1.5" wide masking tape or string to fix sticks to the bed legs to hold the mosquito net up clear of your body. Shop around by telephone to get a better price or try Outdoor Emporium at 67 Camden Road London NW1 020 7428 9533 .

During the rainy season Dilling, Gedaref, and other towns are notorious for malaria although volunteers have not been affected recently. Volunteers in Khartoum have only very rarely had problems.

You should start taking the anti-malaria drug a week or two before departure. If you do get a fever or feel unwell in Sudan it is important to get tested and treatment as soon as possible. If you catch it early, eat well and rest for the full three or four days that a doctor will always recommend and you will recover quickly. If you are traveling and don't have access to a doctor take Quinine tablets at the recommended rates at the same time every day. Anti-malarials should be continued for 4 weeks after return to UK, except Malarone where this is 7 days. Yellow fever is not reported in northern Sudan but there have been cases in El Obeid - so if traveling to the west, working in Dilling University or going further south, get a free inoculation in Khartoum first.

### **What if I get sick?**

SVP has an arrangement with an excellent clinic in Omdurman run by Dr Siddig El Hussein at Modern Medical Centre, Airport Road Khartoum. Dr Siddig can also see the volunteer evenings 6-9 pm at his Surgery in Omdurman. Medical expenses wherever you are in Sudan will be paid by SVP and recovered from our group insurance.

Take water seriously. High volume intake is very important (4 litres fluid/day which includes Pepsi, tea etc). If your urine is a strong yellow colour you are not drinking enough. Mains water in Khartoum and Omdurman is OK or you can drink bottled water. If in doubt, make the water safe by boiling it. Freshly made black tea or coffee are safe.

When traveling and boiling is not an option, the water needs to be treated through an appropriate with sterilising tablets or sterilising filter (which the Boots/Brita or any local ceramic filter is not). The Travel Cup obtainable from camping shops at about £20 is good for this. Any diarrhoea means loss of water from the body and particular trouble **MUST** be taken quickly to re-hydrate with Diareze or Dioralyte or similar OR make a solution yourself of 1/2 tps salt & 8 tps sugar in 1 litre of boiled and cooled water. Dehydration is serious and must be combated at onset of diarrhoea. Avoid vomiting by sipping your re-hydrating solution. The quickest recovery is by getting the doctor to give you a saline drip – don't be shy to ask. Persistent diarrhoea needs urgent treatment: ask the doctor for Flagil.

### **Travel Insurance?**

SVP maintains cover for its volunteers with a group policy arranged with Lloyds underwriters. Be careful with your things as the cover does not compensate for the first £25.00 of any loss. You can get the terms of the cover by email from SVP. Our cover costs £22.50 per volunteer per month and we ask volunteers to contribute £65 towards the first 3 months of cover: SVP pays for the insurance for the whole time you are in Sudan. **REMEMBER TO** Report any loss to the Police & obtain Police Report +send with Insurance Claim Form(Copy available at SVP office in Khartoum.

### **How much will it cost and what about money in Sudan?**

Each volunteer has to pay their own airfare: the return flight by BMI costs about £464. The college of your placement will pay you the equivalent US\$250 per month in Sudanese currency but you will want to take some cash with you (£200 minimum) to set yourself up.

From experience it is always better to bring more, especially if you wish to travel, and in order to look after yourself, it is comforting to have more. Remember to save US\$20 (or the equivalent in Sudanese pounds) to pay airport tax on leaving.

Money is easy to change in Sudan. Exchange rate is about 3.7 -4.0 Sudanese pounds per pound Sterling, but this can vary. It is worth changing no more than \$80 at first, keeping the balance in the college or SVP office safe. Credit cards and travelers cheques don't work in Sudan.

### **What happens at Khartoum Airport?**

Carry a pen to fill the entry card. Give your address as c/o Ministry of Higher Education, Department of Foreign Relations. Getting the baggage off the plane often takes a long time. You go through passport and customs control and are met outside the arrival zone by SVP Sudan people who will help you to get your accommodation. As non-travelers are not permitted into the building you will find the SVP people outside the entrance.

### **What then?**

You will probably be taken to the SVP Sudan office in Khartoum where you can deposit your passport and return ticket in the safe there.

Your Passport will be collected by SVP for Registration and kept in SVP safe, You can collect if you need it, but please keep at safe, you will be given an ID. to carry about.

A member of SVP Sudan will help you to exchange money and you should register with the British Embassy online. You will get the opportunity to meet people at the British Council, and the Head of the Department of the college to which you are attached. You will be able to explore some of Khartoum and Omdurman and learn about the transportation system. Remember that as in other countries, first impressions count: if someone of the same sex as yourself is looking at you, greet them, and if appropriate, shake their hand. At some point after you have begun work at your university you need to get an identity card from them or a letter explaining that you work with them. It is worth carrying this card and papers with you as you travel around, including photocopies of your passport details and valid visas. Remember it is a must to leave your passport at the SVP safe.

### **What about clothes?**

The sun is strong so cover up, temperatures are high so shower and change clothes twice a day. No shorts or bare shoulders for either sex. Women may need a headscarf for some occasions; skirt lengths are long. You can purchase as many scarves from Omdurman Souq as you could possibly desire. Women may also want to purchase a long denim skirt from here, they're inexpensive and very suitable. Other dresses, skirts, tops that you can buy there tend to be non-natural fibres and so quite hot. Trousers (loose fitting & with loose over-shirt) for Western women are OK but as in everything be guided by your Sudanese friends or other volunteers. Long skirts are great, but if they're white they'll probably get stained at the bottom quickly. Take a slip if your skirts are even a little bit see-through. Rural areas and towns such as Dilling are likely to be more conservative in general, jeans or fitted trousers are not suitable. Shirts that reach down to the mid forearm are fine for girls. Wearing a vest underneath a shirt to cover up a plunging neckline is a good idea and also stops shirts from getting ruined so quickly.

Reckon on frequent changes of clothes: laundry is (some washers will not take any female-style clothes so all shirts are fine but no skirts and underwear is strictly not to be given). It's often easier to wash your own. The washing powder is particularly strong stuff and many people find it makes their hands sore. Take rubber gloves with you or buy them there. Buy a stiff scrubbing brush and use this for scrubbing clothes. Clothes dry ridiculously fast even in the shade, put them in the sun and they'll fade quickly. Weddings and other parties are frequent so take some smarter things for that.

Important: you will find all Sudanese take great care to wear freshly laundered and ironed clothes - maintain their respect for you and for SVP by doing likewise. Cotton shirts are a good option, take a small travel iron with you to make sure they're pressed.

Hair should always be tidy and feet should be clean. The most durable shoes are 'Texas', available from all good outdoors shops. You should not wear flip-flops except in the house or when popping to a neighbour or the shops. Sudan is particularly hard on shoes, so you really need good quality brands and products to look after them. However, you can buy cheap shoes almost everywhere.

### **Where will I be working?**

SVP volunteers are always at work with a number of universities in the Khartoum and Omdurman area. You are invited to give your preference to be in or out of the capital on the application form and though we will try our best, we cannot promise that your choice will always be met. Your application if accepted by both you and SVP forms the basis of an agreement that you are available to work between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. but for a maximum of 5 hours per day, which will include some teaching and other informal discussion groups. It is a maximum of 25 hours which maybe in one or more institutions if the demand arises. Remember you must be around the institutions during these hours, even if you are not teaching, as talking with the staff and students is highly useful and required part of your work. Twice a week for 2 hours per session you will be working in one of SVP's centres where informal discussions will take place. This is also an essential part of the SVP Programme. This will bring your total contact hours to 30 hours per week.

SVP arranges (and the host institutions pay) for your accommodation and they also pay basic subsistence (\$225 per month in local currency).

### **What is my status in the college?**

You will be taken to your college and shown round, meeting your colleagues and students. You will be subject to the rules of the college, like any other member of staff, and should receive instructions from, and report any problems to the Principal or departmental head. We will give you more guidance about the teaching during the briefing in Sudan.

### **What is my status in the country?**

You are working for the college to which you are assigned through the Ministry of Higher Education. The college or SVP will take your passport for a day or two and arrange for your presence to be registered with the police. Ask them to issue a letter in Arabic & English stating your attachment to SVP Sudan or your college.

It's handy to have half a dozen copies of the photo page of your passport and the page showing your entry permit and registration for travel outside Khartoum. You need special permits to visit archaeological sites and to use a camera so it's handy to bring some scanned prints of a strip of passport photos. Taking pictures in most places is not a

problem. But if you feel the area may be sensitive (government buildings, bridges, mosques etc.), ask your Sudanese friends first.

### **What about accommodation?**

SVP arranges accommodation with your placement college. You will generally be working and rooming with at least one other volunteer of the same sex. Accommodation is usually basic and hygiene may not be what you are used to. Cleaning equipment is sparse and of poor quality. You will need some towels and perhaps a fitted sheet. You will be able to cook for yourselves or you can buy cheap food from stalls in the road - make sure it is freshly cooked. Fallafal, fuul (beans), lentils will all be part of your daily diet. There are good salads, vegetables and fruits available cheaply in the markets, try steaming pumpkin. Cheese, yoghurt, chocolate, eggs, tuna, biscuits, oats, jam and honey are all readily available in all small shops together with sweet drinks. The team of volunteers are based quite close to each other and should arrange to meet regularly, probably at the British Council.

### **How do I get in touch with SVP when I need help or advice?**

Bring your mobile telephone and get the sim card changed for a local pay as you go. You will get maps and a long list of useful telephone numbers at your briefing. If you find yourself in an emergency you should contact the Consular officers at the British Embassy or your own embassy if you are not British, details of contacts will be given when you register in Khartoum..

### **What about social life?**

Ask colleagues and students to show you the sights and help with information. Some may invite you to parties or to meet their families. If they do, accept. Food will probably be served later than you'd expect (breakfast is 11ish in the morning, lunch at 4-5 pm). Soon after the meal people go home. Visit local attractions like the Sufis and Nuba wrestlers when you can

### **How do I get around?**

In the city area buses on the main roads are frequent and cheap. There are buses and also shared taxis to destinations out of town and motorised rickshaws. Have a look at the 'Things to do in Khartoum' document for some details on the bus system, you'll pick it up quickly, other volunteers will help you get the hang of it. When you're beginning and you want to get somewhere in particular, get a Sudanese friend to write it down in Arabic and other people will help you. The Sudanese will go way out of their way to help you out.

### **Telephones**

Life is much easier with a mobile phone: you can bring your mobile with you and buy a Sudan based sim card for roughly \$50, talk credit can be bought in cards of 1000 SD, or 2500 SD.

### **Can I travel inside the country at a break period?**

Yes, but you will need written authorisation from your assigned college or the SVP Co-ordinator in Sudan. This document will also help you if you are stopped at any point in your journey. Plan any journey ahead with friends and the people at your college: get an introduction to someone (particularly at a college) at your destination, then you will have

someone to meet and somewhere to stay overnight. Over the desert it's best to travel by bus as the driver knows the way: private cars don't and easily get lost. Bus seat/s can sometimes be reserved a day or two in advance and try to get a place near the front. Over the desert the motion in the back can bang your head on the rack if you don't hold on to your seat all the time. Expect the departure and journey times to be elastic. Someone in the bus will know the people you are planning to call on. As noted, you must get travel, photo and archaeological permits before you set off. Don't reckon on leaving Sudan for a break except for an emergency while you are working with SVP – re-entry visas have become troublesome and expensive. Please remember to inform the SVP coordinator of your whereabouts.

You should only travel during the holidays. You are entitled to 1 week holiday every 3 months; ask the SVP Assistant Coordinator to help arrange your holiday.

SVP is sending more volunteers to rural areas of Sudan; any travel which you do may be very useful to us in helping to organise projects. Likely destinations include Ed Dueim, Wad Medani, Kosti, El-Obeid, Karima, Dongola, Atbara, Port Sudan, Kassala.

You should not enter any part of Sudan where there may be conflict, ie the Eastern and Southern districts or Darfur, and in any case you will not get a permit. The Sudanese army controls access to the rural areas of the country; make sure your permit specifies the correct destination/s (nobody worries if you put a lot more than necessary).

### **What about the politics of the country?**

Don't get drawn into making political statements or judgments either about the Sudan government or about the West or about the conflict in the West. People talk freely about these important topics but remember that you are a visitor and guest and that SVP's mission is educational.

### **What if something goes wrong?**

You must see that you are registered with the British Embassy - this is now done online - and if there is any decision to repatriate, SVP will be guided by the Embassy; your welfare is paramount to us. It is worth noting that personal security is very good, there is no personal animosity to westerners. Our volunteers who were in Khartoum when the US bombed the pharmaceutical factory in 1998 experienced no hostility or resentment.

### **If I am not happy with SVP, how do I complain?**

Complaints should be made immediately to the SVP Coordinator – in writing and preferably by email. Any matter that cannot be addressed locally will be referred to SVP UK, and if necessary will be brought to the attention of the trustees. They may invite you to a meeting or to put the matter to an independent arbitrator.

### **What are the arrangements for the return flight?**

Leave your ticket in the safe with SVP: it must be reconfirmed 3 weeks before the return flight so it's wise to check that SVP will do this, or do it yourself, the BMI office is just down the road from the SVP office. Check yourself in good time that the reservation is being made. You will need US\$20 or equivalent for airport tax at the airport. You must give notice to SVP of 4 weeks in advance of your departure date, in order to guarantee the exit visa is obtained in good time.

**What should I read or watch?**

Though it's difficult to find material that is up to date, in fiction, try Tayeb Salih's *The Season of Migration to the North* and *The Wedding of Zein & other Stories* also look at *A History of Sudan-from the coming of Islam to the present day* by P M Holt & M W Daly (Longman) also Sudan: a nation in the balance by Chris Peters (Oxfam) and the Nile section of Michael Palin's TV series *Pole to Pole*. For the 19th century Alan Moorehead's books *The White Nile* and *The Blue Nile* are both entertaining, as is Thomas Pakenham's *The Scramble for Africa*. Read *Travellers Good Health Guide*; Ted Lankaster; Sheldon Press. Specially recommended is *The Camel Strayed* by Richard Poole from Bloozoo by telephoning 01206 868200. *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* by Douglas Johnson will give you academic insight into the civil war. Easier reading is *Emma's War* by Deborah Scroggins.

**How will I keep in touch with home?**

Get a hotmail or another webmail address you can use from Sudan as the quickest and cheapest way to stay in contact. Set up email addresses for your friends and family in the UK. There is access to email at the British Council and there are lots of Internet Cafes in Khartoum at reasonable cost. For parents and friends in the UK in case of communication problems, contact:

Osama Salih 020 3255 0159 & 07990 832 767 osama@svp-uk.com

David Wolton 020 7485 8619 & 07910 940 819 david@svp-uk.com

Airmail to you at Khartoum takes about 5 days.

The British Council has a bag, if you take lots of stamps with you then they'll post things for you in the UK.

**What other things should I take?**

Sunglasses, white hat, u/v barrier cream (high factor), aftersun lotion, rehydration tablets, small pocket torch (with several decent spare batteries), swimming costume, , strong walking sandals (Teva are good),.

For travel outside the city area: a small rucksack, a water bottle, water purification tablets. repetition eyedrops esp for contact lens wearers. It is hard to find a good, strong day bag in Sudan, take this with you.

Immodium, rehydration tablets, antibiotic cream, and water purification tablets, the pill and vitamins if you take them.

Deodorant, contact lens solution, tampons (tampons are not sold in Sudan), ear buds, if you have long hair some deep conditioner, tweezers, good plasters, good cream for faces, a good toothbrush, lots of insect repellent, razors.

Some people have enjoyed silk sleeping sheets for the hotter time of year. In winter (December, January) you might appreciate a sleeping bag.

If you have duct tape you'll use it. Ditto a penknife. Sewing Kit and safety pins.

Rechargeable batteries and a charger. A little torch. You won't have to have a laptop but some volunteers have found it useful. Two prong plugs for electronic items. Extra care has to be taken of all of these things from the dust which is exceptionally bad at times in Khartoum.

Books, will always be appreciated by other volunteers, as will newspapers from the day you leave, magazines etc.

A short-wave radio to get the BBC (good Luck with this!!)

Some Arabic in your head before you arrive will be useful immediately.  
Some cash to get you started.  
Marmite, herbs and snacks to last as long as they can.

**What can I buy easily there?**

A pumice stone and cheap moisturizing cream for your feet early on is a good investment to stop cracked feet.

Flip-flops, toothpaste. Almost everything you might need will be find-able, if not in the souq then in 'posh' shops in Amarat.

**Briefing?**

You will get a chance to discuss all these questions and many more when you contact ex-volunteers and Sudanese colleagues. There are extensive briefing notes available from SVP by email to guide your teaching. More briefing and orientation takes place on arrival with our staff and volunteers there. Make a point of meeting us at the Sudanese Supplementary School in North Wharf Road off Edgware Road which is open most term time Saturday mornings: there you can meet many Sudanese and gain valuable insight and contacts

There are restrictions on bringing back meat, food and plant products into the UK have a look at [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

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