YOUR JOURNEY STARTS HERE
SITE HANDBOOK

#INDIA
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> **Introduction**

This Handbook was written to provide you with useful information regarding your participation in an Amizade sponsored program. It answers many of the frequently asked questions by previous participants. Read this entire handbook carefully and contact our office if you have any questions. Please note that best resource for you during your pre-departure planning is our website, which can be found at [amizade.org](http://amizade.org).

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> **Amizade’s Mission & Vision**

Amizade empowers individuals and communities through worldwide service and learning. We seek to create an equitable world where all people can connect freely and forge lasting friendships.

> **Amizade’s Commitment**

At the heart of Amizade is the sincere belief that intercultural understanding and the development of global citizens is essential to our increasingly connected global world. We are committed to providing you with an intercultural experience that allows you to make concrete contributions to a community resulting in a deeper understanding of your role in the global community.
1. Approach to service

Ethic of Service
Amizade strives to promote an "ethic of service" on all our programs. This means that we envision the entire experience as one of service to our fellow human beings. There will be scheduled time for completing service projects on each program, but we also encourage you to carry your ethic of service with you throughout the program. You can do this by volunteering to help with food preparation, cleaning, or various other daily tasks.

As guests in the host community, Amizade volunteers are encouraged to act respectfully in all community interactions. The global service experience provides a unique opportunity to learn from the traditions, beliefs, and customs of a new community. Since most Amizade volunteers come from outside of the community, they are often seen as "ambassadors" representing their countries and are able to use this opportunity to share positively about their culture. At the same time, volunteers have the unique opportunity of experiencing another culture while taking the time to absorb and respect new world views.

Volunteer opportunities
While in India, volunteers' service will vary depending on their program type. Volunteers may work with Visions Global Empowerment at a youth leadership camp. Please note that the current needs of the community will determine our service project. As such, the specifics regarding your volunteer work will be provided to you upon arrival.

2. The On-Site Experience

The Amizade experience
The time that you spend in India is sure to be one filled with many new experiences: new outlooks, new cultures, and new situations. Therefore, the Amizade experience is enhanced by looking at some of the things that have been written in relation to the country and the issues over the last several years, getting a rough idea of what's happening, and going with an informed set of questions in mind. The entire experience is about getting in deep enough and starting to dream enough to realize that your time abroad can't possibly be enough to see and understand all of India or the South Asia, but it can be enough to get an idea of it, connect with new friends, meet and struggle with some significant challenges, make connections, create difference, and begin to understand an entirely different kind of place. That's really a lot for such a short amount of time, yet much of it will happen.

And all of this will take place in the context of a relatively unpredictable environment. Unpredictable does not mean that it is unsafe. All programs work through our partner individuals and community organizations. Unpredictable simply describes the "climate" of Amizade programs' in India. That means it's characterized by something called a "lack of redundancy." Lack of redundancy refers to an absence of continuously present and reliable systems and products. With water supply, that means it may go out sporadically. With transportation, it means buses may be delayed. In stores or restaurants, it may mean the things they sell are not what they advertise outside, but rather whatever they have in stock (or can quickly get from a neighbor) inside. All of this relates to an absolutely essential ongoing Amizade motto, which is:
"OK, GOOD."

“Okay, good” refers to moments when we show up for transit at the right time, yet quickly learn that transit will not be arriving for eight hours. “Okay, good,” we have an opportunity to hang out in India. “Okay, good” refers to moments when we long for some familiar comfort foods, but we have another helping of the same, exotic local foods. “Okay, good,” we have a great deal more exotic local food than most of those around us. “Okay, good” refers to times when we’re cramped into transportation (cars, vans, trains) in a way that we did not previously believe was possible. “Okay, good,” we have transportation and are moving to our desired destination more easily than most people in the area. “Okay, good” is about remembering – even when we feel that we are struggling – that we are fortunate for the opportunities to travel and serve; that we are still in amazing places with incredible people; and that life will go on even though (unlike in our local environment) the day-to-day life is just not all that predictable. Of course, “Okay, good” is also useful when the last leg of the return flight home doesn’t connect at the right time!

> Site Director,
The site director is the primary program contact responsible for coordinating volunteers. The site director is responsible for coordination of logistics such as greeting volunteers, arranging housing and meals, setting up cultural experiences with local community members, and often leading reflection discussions. Coordination also involves setting up the service project, arranging transportation to and from various locations, partnering with local masons and builders, procuring building supplies, and any other related planning. The site director will work closely with volunteer placements when they first arrive to help arrange everything.

> On-Site Orientation
Upon arrival in India, Amizade will hold a program orientation for all volunteers. Many issues such as health, safety, and security will be addressed as well as site logistics, standard procedures, and other important information that will benefit each volunteer to know.

> Group Living
Amizade programs generally have a strong core element built around group living. For many people, living, volunteering, studying, completing projects, and spending leisure time in a group may be new. Therefore we ask all Amizade volunteers to approach group interaction with flexibility, openness, and constructive communication. We strive to respect each other’s space and needs while also supporting each other to achieve personal goals on the program.

> Amizade Staff
Amizade programs are staffed by a variety of motivated, trained people. We encourage you to get to know the staff members that will be coordinating your volunteer program. Any concerns or questions during the in-country experience should be directed to the appropriate Amizade staff.
> 3. Local Considerations

For more information on the region and our partners, please visit:

- Visions Global Empowerment: [http://visionsglobalempowerment.org](http://visionsglobalempowerment.org)
4. Preparing for your program

> Transportation to Site
You will be flying in and out of the Chennai, India airport. An Amizade staff person will meet you at the airport to transport you to the program site. All volunteers are required to arrive on or before the scheduled program start date and depart on or after the scheduled finish date. If volunteers arrive early or stay late, the individual volunteer will need to make his/her own arrangements for food, lodging, and airport transfer.

> Travel Documents
The following information is for US citizens going abroad. If you are a non-US citizen, you must check with the consulate in your country regarding travel documents including passport and visa requirements.

**Passport and Visa**
All volunteers will need the following to enter India:

1. Valid Passport (must be valid for at least six (6) months)
2. Indian Tourist Visa
3. Necessary Immunizations

A valid U.S. passport and Tourist Visa are required to enter and depart India. U.S. citizens whose passports are lost or stolen in India must obtain a new passport. In order to replace a lost or stolen passport, you must immediately file a police report with Indian authorities, preferably in the nearest location to where the loss or theft occurred. After the report is filed, you must make an appointment online with the US Consulate General in Chennai, India (note: if you depart in less than a week, no appointment is needed). You must bring the appropriate documents and applications.

> Electrical Voltage and Outlets Abroad
The electrical outlets of India allow 230V at 50 Hertz to pass through them and are utilized with D outlet plugs, though C outlets are also common. By comparison, the electrical outlets of the United States allow 120V at 60 Hertz to pass through them and are utilized with A and B outlet plugs. Use this information to purchase any electrical voltage and/or plug adapters for your electronic belongings. Keep in mind that most laptops have the “black box converter” attached to their power cords.

>> Please be prepared in case of losing your wallet, passport, or other travel documents. Bring copies of all your important travel documents and monetary documents, especially your passport and visa, and store one set of copies in your luggage while leaving another set of copies with your emergency contact at home.

Information regarding US passports is available at:
http://www.travel.state.gov/
5. Health and Safety

> General Notes

- Traveling often affects one’s health, so it is imperative that all volunteers are in good physical condition.
- Typical travel ailments include stomach upsets and diarrhea, bug bites, jet lag, minor cuts, scrapes, bruises, and sunburn. Please feel free to bring travel-sized portions of over the counter medicines such as headache medicine, stomach medicines, sun block, bug spray, band-aids, etc.
- An on-site Amizade staff member will have a first aid kit.
- Check with your medical physician regarding further information about healthy travel abroad.

> Immunizations

Participants in Amizade programs are solely responsible for receiving immunizations. Amizade defers all inquiries to the current recommendations and requirements from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). All participants are expected to consult the CDC for required and recommended immunizations for the country or countries they will be visiting for their Amizade program. See your doctor at least 4–6 weeks before your trip to allow time for the immunizations to take full effect.

Current information regarding immunizations can be found on the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). Please refer to the website for further information.

For more information:

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

1600 Clifton Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30333 USA
(404) 639-3311 (404) 639-3312 (TTY)

Public Inquiries 1-404-639-3534 and 1-800-311-3435
National Immunization Hotline (English)
1-800-232-2522
National Immunization Hotline (Spanish)
1-800-232-0233
Traveler’s Health: 1-877-394-8747

**Traveler’s Health Website:**

Email form: [http://www.cdc.gov/netinfo.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/netinfo.htm)

> Prescription Medicines

If you have prescription medicines, bring them in the original prescription bottles with your name on them and bring an ample supply for the duration of your program. In some countries, certain medicines are not as readily available.

> The Best Medicine is “Preventative Medicine”

Throughout the program, please rest, drink plenty of water, and take care to avoid overexposure to the sun. While on the program, let the Amizade staff know if you have any concerns about your health and contact them immediately if you experience a health emergency.

> Amizade Medical and Insurance Form

All volunteers are required to complete and submit the Amizade Medical and Insurance Form prior to participation. It is imperative that you complete this form as comprehensively as possible so Amizade staff can best address medical situations on site. On this form you will also list your immunization records. Please consult with your physician regarding your healthy participation in the service work and activities for your program and recommended immunizations.

Unless otherwise noted, international traveler’s insurance is included in your program cost. Our policies are underwritten by CMI Insurance.

> Safety

As a volunteer in the community you will have local companions and friends. Volunteers should observe and imitate local customs regarding safety.

Regardless of where you are it is best to travel in pairs, especially at night. Be cautious with your money and make sure you store it in a safe place or in a money belt.

Trust your instincts. If you do not feel safe in a situation or someone’s behavior is making you uncomfortable, get out of the situation immediately. Firmly say “no” to any invitation you do not want and turn away. Ignore persistent overtures.
> 6. Money Matters

> Currency Converter

For the latest conversion rate for your country, please visit www.xe.com.

> Bringing Money Abroad

Many of the costs of your program are included in the program fees for Amizade, so keep this in mind when you plan the amount of money that you would like to bring from home. When traveling, having cash-on-hand is always a useful and wise idea. However, it is recommended that you bring an amount of cash that meets your needs but does not hugely exceed the amount you would typically spend over the course of a few days. Upon arriving in India, there are exchange bureaus. Banks in larger cities will also have currency exchange services. Nevertheless, it is highly recommended that ATMs are utilized for the purpose of money access. With ATMs, exchange rates are applied automatically and are generally up-to-date with the current rates.

> ATMs

Perhaps the best, most highly recommended way to access money while abroad is utilizing ATMs. ATMs can be easily found within any larger city in Tamil Nadu, such as Chennai. ATMs are also located in more rural areas. During your volunteer experience in Thiruvannamalai, you will find a number of ATMs available. Visa is the most widely accepted card in India (and often, worldwide). It is advised that volunteers check with their home bank to confirm the type of ATM card they carry. The most commonly accepted cards are linked to the Plus and Cirrus bank systems. ATMs automatically apply exchange rates and are generally up-to-date with the current international rates. It is very important to inform your bank that you will be using your card to withdrawal money while in India. This will help to avoid them from issuing a “hold” on your card which prevents one from withdrawing money. As always, use common sense and care when using an ATM and planning the amount needed for your activities.

> Departure taxes

While most countries do apply departure taxes onto any foreign national leaving their country, most travelers never realize it. Departure taxes are usually included in the cost of airfare. In general, travel to and departure from India usually includes a departure tax in the cost of airfare. It is the responsibility of participants to pay any airport taxes as Amizade does not cover the cost of airport taxes.
7. Packing List

> What to Wear?
First and foremost, participants should plan and pack according to the weather, climate and temperature. As previously stated, Tamil Nadu, India experiences an extremely hot, humid climate. The weather throughout the state of Tamil Nadu is known for high temperatures and heavy humidity year round. Therefore, light, tasteful, and breathable clothing is highly recommended. Keep in mind that, depending on your service placement while on-site, you may consider bringing clothing that you don’t mind getting a little dirty. It is also important to remember that you are acting as “diplomats.” While abroad, you represent not only your country of origin, but also your university or organization, Amizade and even yourself. It is highly recommended that, along with packing for the climate of the region, you pack clothing that is tasteful, respectful and conservative.

>> PLEASE PACK LIGHTLY!
You should bring a maximum of two bags. Ideally, this includes one medium-sized suitcase/duffel bag and a smaller daypack for daily activities. You should be able to carry your luggage comfortably by yourself, though it will be unlikely that you’ll need to walk long distances with your luggage. Please use your best judgment regarding valuables. Amizade does not recommend that volunteers bring expensive jewelry, electronics, etc. Amizade is not reliable for lost or stolen articles.

> Strongly Encouraged Packing List
- Documents: passport (original + 3 copies), airline tickets, personal health insurance information, and cash, ATM/credit cards (and copies of each in a separate place)
- Camera
- Converter/Adapter
- Flash Drive if applicable
- Towel and wash cloth
- Toiletries – just the basics such as toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo/conditioner, and soap
- Prescriptions in original bottles (remember to bring enough for the entire program!)
- Clothing
  - T-shirts
  - Two pairs of pants
  - Two pairs of shorts
  - One nice outfit
  - Socks and underwear
  - Pajamas
  - 2-3 long sleeve shirts
  - 1-2 jackets, including one rain jacket
- One pair of closed-toe, comfortable walking shoes
- One pair of sturdy sandals
- Work boots if applicable (a sturdy hiking boot will work well)
- Work gloves if applicable
- Sun protection: bandanas, hat, sunglasses and sun block
- Bug spray containing DEET

> Recommended Packing List:
- Family photos to share with the community
- Postcards of your hometown to share with the community
- Travel alarm clock
- Small day bag
- Over-the-counter medications (headache, stomach, band-aids, anti-itch cream)
- Shower shoes or flip-flops
- Modest bathing suit

> Gifts
You may choose to bring small gifts or thank you cards for community members. Photographs are generally appreciated around the world so feel free to collect addresses and mail pictures back if possible.
8. While you are away / Returning home

Culture Shock
Culture shock is a term used to describe the emotional upset that may occur when a person travels to a new culture. When experiencing culture shock, people sometimes feel unsure about what is appropriate in the new culture, confused about how to manage daily tasks (such as banking or telephoning), frustrated with managing language and cultural barriers and generally vulnerable. This experience is normal and affects people at different times throughout a cultural immersion program. Remember to rest, eat and take care of your physical and emotional needs in order to function at your best!

Drug Use and Alcohol Use
Amizade in no way encourages the use of or purchase of drugs while visiting any of our sites. As an organization, our primary concern is that of the safety of our volunteers. For this reason, we adhere to a drug-free policy for all of our programs. We ask that all volunteers please respect this as a rule of Amizade. Failure to comply with this rule is grounds for removal from the program. Drinking alcoholic beverages is allowed in moderation, but every participant should be mindful of cultural sentiments towards drinking as well as drinking responsibly. In the conservative state of Tamil Nadu, alcohol is not widely available.

Contacting Home
India has several cellular service providers and is known for having consistently good coverage. Nevertheless, it is recommended that if you desire a cellular phone while on-site, you purchase a prepaid phone upon arrival in India. World Phones are typically very expensive and some participants have experienced difficulties while on-site with World Phones purchased at home. Prepaid wireless phones are inexpensive and incoming calls do not incur any fees on you! If you ultimately choose to purchase a phone, an Amizade staff member can assist you with preparing the appropriate paperwork and safety checks required.

Reverse Culture Shock
Many participants find that they encounter difficulties when transitioning home. Volunteers will be happy to return home and visit with family and friends, but after the initial reunions take place, they often find that they experience problems when trying to communicate the experience that they had abroad. Many people feel alienated, knowing that they have grown while many of those around them remain the same. It may help to connect with others who have had similar travel experiences, as they understand the need to talk about the experience in greater detail. If you would like to be connected with past participants from an Amizade program, please let an Amizade staff member know, and we will facilitate that for you.

AMIZADE CONTACT INFORMATION
If someone from home needs to contact a volunteer with an emergency message, they can phone the Amizade US office to relay a message.

● Amizade US Office Phone: 412-586-4986. This phone line is staffed 9 am – 4 pm EST from Monday - Friday.
   ● Have the person leave:
     - Their name
     - Your name
     - Their phone number
     - The message to be relayed

● Amizade Emergency Phone #: 412-444-5166. This phone line is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week during volunteer programs.

To call the United States from India, dial 00-1-area code-local number. For instance, if you were to call Amizade from India, you would dial 00-1-412-586-4986.