

Volunteering with The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust

We welcome professional volunteers such as vets, equine dentists, farriers, physiotherapists throughout the year. Supporters and horse lovers are welcome to visit, but the only time they can be really useful to us is at the time of the annual show which is normally in December each year.

The best times for professional volunteers to come are from November to April which is the tourist season as the weather is better and cheaper package flights can be found. You may come at any time of the year, but be warned it can be slightly more expensive and the weather can get quite hot. July to September is the rainy season.

Whilst working with us provides volunteers with valuable experience, we ask that in return, you share your knowledge and teach our staff and students from The College and University as well as our apprentices.

Over the years our wonderful volunteers have made a real and lasting contribution to animal health and welfare through their training.

We will meet you at the airport and provide food water and accommodation. Volunteers usually come for two weeks, sometimes longer and we split their stays between our two centres.

Costs

We provide food water and accommodation for £25 per day and we charge £15 for airport transfers, all other travel is provided by the charity.

If you would like to apply and for further information, please contact ghdtooffice@gmail.com

General Travel Information for The Gambia

Climate – The Gambia can be HOT! The rainy season runs from June until September, and during these months it is very humid between the rains. The rains can be extremely heavy and waterproof gear is essential for anyone visiting during this period. The coolest period is between November and March, however temperatures are generally still high during the day. During this period temperatures do drop a little at night, so you may want a couple of jumpers to keep you warm. It is probably still hotter than a summer's night in the UK though! From April until June it gets gradually hotter and temperatures can get exceedingly high. We have had thermometers that have gone off the scale in the shade during this period in Sambel Kunda, so if you are visiting during this time, please be aware that there will be very little respite from the heat.

Currency – Local currency in The Gambia is Dalasis. We recommend that you bring GBP with you in cash and exchange it once in Gambia, where you will get a better exchange rate. Please ensure that you have enough for the duration of your stay, as once we leave the coastal area you will be unable to access any more money.

It is difficult for us to advise you on how much money to bring with you, as it really is a personal matter. However, to guide you there is very little for you to spend your money on when you are upcountry. You will need a little money to buy food and drinks when you are at the coast if you choose to go out for a meal, and for drinks other than water during your stay. You may also have the opportunity to go on a river boat trip which you would be required to pay for, and you may wish to

buy some presents or African artefacts to take home with you. As a rough guide, for a stay of between 2 and 4 weeks we usually suggest bringing around £200.

Equipment – Please be aware that we are a small charity working in a very remote area. We are very unlikely to have all of the tools and medicines that you would have in the UK when treating sick and injured animals. We do the best we can with what we have available to us, and this often requires some serious ‘thinking outside the box’ when treating cases. Please be prepared to work as a team with our staff who are experienced in dealing with difficult cases with limited resources.

Euthanasia – Whilst many of the cases that we see would be immediately euthanized in our home countries, this is not always possible in The Gambia. Due to religious reasons it is common for owners to refuse to have their animal put to sleep. Whilst we do what we can to educate the owners in these situations, we do not have the authority to put animals to sleep without the owner’s consent. In this situation we do whatever is in our power to make the animal’s life more comfortable.

Food – Food in the upcountry areas of the Gambia is basic. Please do not expect anything fancy! The diet mainly consists of rice and sauce. Peanuts feature highly in Gambian cooking, and it is therefore essential to inform us if you have a nut allergy. Please also ensure that you let us know before your departure if you have any other food requirements or allergies. If we are not informed about such things before you arrive at GHDT it may not be possible for us to accommodate your needs, due to the very limited food that is available upcountry.

Health – Please take responsibility for your health, starting from before you leave home. Please ensure that you have adequate malaria prophylaxis for the duration of your trip. Please also ensure that you have any required vaccinations for The Gambia. We strongly advise you to have the rabies vaccine before your visit to The Gambia – whilst the country is suggested to be a fairly low rabies risk, working with animals brings an increased risk and you will be staying in a remote area. Please ensure that when discussing vaccinations with your GP that you explain the full extent of the work that you will be doing, and that you will be staying in a very remote area. STD’s and HIV are a concern within the country so please keep this in mind.

Language – The official language of Gambia is English, although once you are upcountry not everyone can speak English. There are a variety of tribal languages used throughout the Gambia, which differ from place to place. The local tribal language in the village where GHDT is based in Sambel Kunda is ‘Fulla’, but other languages are also used! We have a number of English speaking staff who are able to translate for you if necessary.

Important Documents – Please bring a photocopy of your important documents (including travel insurance) and ID, and keep these in a separate place from the originals, in case of the unfortunate event of the originals becoming lost, stolen or damaged.

Mobile phones – There is usually good mobile phone signal in most places in Gambia. We recommend that on arrival you purchase a Gambian sim card (equivalent of approx.. £1). This is the cheapest way to keep in touch with people at home, and also makes it easier to contact people within Gambia, should you need to. The Gambian sim cards work on a pay as you go basis, and credit can be purchased in most local villages. We advise you to bring an old unlocked phone if at all possible. Some of the newer phones do not accept the Gambian sim cards

Plugs – The Gambia generally uses English style plug sockets, so any chargers that you use in the UK should be suitable for use in Gambia. We have solar power at Makasut but in Sambel Kunda we have power sockets in the stable yard and house where you can charge electrical items, the volunteer house has limited electricity, so it is essential that you bring a torch/headtorch for the evenings.

Ramadan – This is the holy month of the Islamic calendar, when Muslims will be fasting. The time of Ramadan varies from year to year. If your visit coincides with Ramadan, please be considerate of the local people. During this period Muslims will not eat, drink, or smoke between dawn and dusk, and food becomes much more difficult to come by when you are out at different villages or visiting markets. People's tempers can be (understandably) shorter during this period, so please consider this when you are working with people who are fasting, and try to put yourself in their shoes.

Religion – The majority of Gambians are Muslim, although other religions are also practiced. Please respect the culture of the country that you are visiting. Women are expected to keep their knees and midriffs covered at all times when in the local villages. This includes when playing sport. The coastal areas are more accustomed to Western practices, and shorts/skirts may be worn in these areas at your discretion.

Team Work – Our team of Gambian staff are a real asset to the charity. Although they may not be qualified vets they have extensive experience and knowledge of illnesses and injuries that occur to animals within their country. Their practical experience of dealing with diseases such as Trypanosomiasis and Epizootic Lymphangitis are excellent, and we hope that you will be able to learn as much from them as they will from you. Most of our staff are trained in dealing with veterinary cases so please work with them on all cases and remember that once you have left they will be the ones continuing the care of the animals. For this reason it is essential that the staff are aware of all treatment regimes, and we ask that you work hand in hand with them at all times.

Whilst we try to ensure that all veterinary volunteers have the opportunity to see as many cases as possible, it is inevitable that we have unpredictable busy and quiet times with veterinary cases. We encourage all of our volunteers to come with a flexible approach and a willingness to participate in all aspects of the charities work, in the event of it being a quiet period. We will do everything we can to ensure that you get the most from your visit, and feel that the people who enjoy their experience the most are the ones who immerse themselves in all aspects of our work.

Travel (within the country) – There are numerous road checks within the Gambia, and it is possible that if you are stopped at a road check you will be asked to show your passport as identification. Please ensure that whenever you travel within the country you have your passport with you, but ensure that you keep this on your person, in a safe place.

Water – Bottled drinking water will be provided for you during your stay with GHDT. If you drink any local water this is done so entirely at your own risk. Please be responsible about drinking enough water during your stay – the climate is extremely hot and you will need to drink considerably more than you would normally. Please ensure that when you are going out of the GHDT centre you take enough bottles of water with you for the length of time you expect to be out. It is often not possible to buy bottled water in surrounding villages so ensure you leave the centre fully prepared. Please do not expect someone else to remember enough water for you!