

Advice to volunteers from previous volunteers who worked at Gogar Primary School or the Vanessa Grant School

Updated March 2011.

Introduction:

The Gogar Primary School and the Vanessa Grant School are situated on the edge of Gogar Farm (a commercial farm owned by Hamish Grant). Gogar Primary is a government run school which currently has 800 pupils (there were 300 in 2001). Situated in a slightly dusty bowl, but next to a river, it also has quite large playing fields. The school itself is basic when compared with those in the first world. The classrooms are also overcrowded with up to 60 in a class and a single teacher. The only materials this teacher is likely to have are chalk, a blackboard and text and exercise books. The teaching you will be asked to do will slightly depend on your personal expertise, but we taught English, Music, Art and Craft, P.E and Games. Initially it was daunting being thrown into a class with that many children alone, with no teaching experience and no materials. However, the children, in comparison to English school children are extremely eager to learn. They and the other staff were very welcoming and encouraging. Sister Hiltrude, the Headmistress is extremely warm, kind and will help you at all times. The friendliness of the Common Room had an appreciable effect on our enjoyment of the whole experience.

At the school there will be a huge expectation of you, as you are from a highly educated western country (apparently). As such it is best to dress smartly in shirt and slacks, show lots of willing and be punctual. The other teachers are not great at these things so it is good to set some kind of example.

One of the most rewarding aspects is getting involved with the teachers. They are eager to hear what the UK is like, how much money they would need if they were to visit etc. They are so welcoming and the more effort you put into developing this relationship, the more benefits you will reap as term progresses. We were given the most fantastic send off which highlighted how pleased they were to have sparked up a close working companionship.

At times you may feel underworked – for 3 weeks there were student teachers doing work experience at the school so they took most of our allocated lessons. If you find yourselves sitting around, always push the staff to give you something. E.G. we trained up a Gogar 1st XI football team and gave them old Swindon FC shirts as their reward for making the team. Organising local matches is good fun.

The Vanessa Grant School is a government run residential school for mentally handicapped children. Its development has been subsidised by the V.G.S Trust. Hence it is well furnished with good facilities and a beautiful complex. Similar to Gogar, there is a dedicated Headmistress, Naomi Ndungu, and a committed staff room who look after about 35 children. It is situated at the end of Gogar's playing fields and both schools are about a 10 minute cycle or a 25 minute walk from the accommodation. See the website: <http://www.vanessagrantschool.org/>

The atmosphere in VGS is more welcoming and friendly, every child will love, hug and want to be your best friend. The teachers are very dedicated to the children and will expect the same from you.

Accommodation:

The accommodation is basic but there is electricity, running bore hole water and a Kuni burner which, if lit, provides hot water for a shower in 15 minutes. There are two bedrooms, two bathrooms with flushing toilets, a living room (painted during the teacher strike so it is looking fresh) and a small equipped kitchen, which also has a small fridge. Beds and bedding and mosquito nets are provided. There are water filters and internet access via a dongle, if you have a laptop. The views of the farm are fantastic.



How to get here:

The postal address of the farm is Box 60, Rongai, Nr. Nakuru, 20108, Kenya. It is physically located about 1km from Rongai village. Rongai is 30km NW of Nakuru which is 130km NW of Nairobi. Rongai is near the western edge of the Rift Valley and 30km south of the Equator.

On arrival in Nairobi it is perhaps advisable to stay one night. We stayed in the Nairobi International Youth Hostel for approximately \$9 a night, it's very basic but is perfect for just a night stop and you can arrange pick up from the airport for about 1500 shillings. You can book the hostel

either by calling on 254-20-2723012 or on the internet through hostel world.

In the morning arrange for a taxi too take you to the Eldoret bus going to Nakuru. The bus is large and costs 300 shillings for a three hour journey. Once in Nakuru find the Matatu to Rongai, this is situated near where the Eldoret drops you off, the Matatu costs 90 shillings. One piece of advice around bus stops: try not to talk to anyone asking where you are going, as they will try and show you the correct bus, but for a huge expense! However it can be useful to spend that little bit extra if you don't know where your going and whatever you do keep your luggage with you at all times even if large, always have it so you can see it, otherwise it will go missing.

From Rongai you will probably want to ring Johnny if you don't know your way around, but you are about 10 mins away from your house.

However you may want to use matatus or buses from the centre of Nairobi when you are more comfortable with the set up. If you are coming to Rongai for the first time you may feel unsafe in Nairobi and you may wish to just arrange a lift with somebody on the farm through Johnny. However a taxi all the way to Nakuru will be extremely expensive. (13200 shillings) It is expensive but worth it for getting you there safe in a foreign country you don't yet know. Johnny will be able to get in touch with a taxi driver called George. My advice is to fly over night arriving in Nairobi early morning so you are in Rongai by afternoon.

Later when you feel more comfortable in Kenya you will start to travel on your own. The public transport in Kenya is based on buses and matatus or on the bicycle-taxi which are called "boda-boda" (or little vehicles with three wheels called "tuk-tuk", mostly at the coast).

The matatu station in Rongai is situated on the main road. If you walk past the Celltell supermarket (on your left) and continue on the main road heading out of Rongai, you will see the station. Your best bet if wanting to go to Nakuru or further afield is to always get a matatu to Nakuru (this is really all you can do from Rongai). It tends to drop you on the dual carriageway opposite 'Gilani's supermarket or on the knitting needle roundabout by Barclays West. If wanting to potter around Nakuru, walking in to town is simple. When wanting to return to Rongai or catch your matatu to your next destination, head up the main high street and you will come to a roundabout with market stalls around it. Cross the roundabout and you will be met by fleets of matatus all stating where they go.

If going to Nairobi, we found a more reliable and comfortable matatu company called 'Prestige' which is situated up the side street opposite the Family Bank. It cost 350 shillings to get to Nairobi. There are no timings

for matatu departure – when a matatu is full it will leave, regardless of how long that takes so bear that in mind when returning home.

In Rongai and Salgaa you can easily go by boda-boda, if you do not want to walk.

They are more comfortable than they look like and they are quite fast. Usually they charge about 20KSH but it is fun bargaining with these boys.

Be careful at the bus stations and in crowded vehicles. Keep your money hidden and make sure nobody can get his hands into your pockets. It is a law to close the seat belt but nobody seems to care. You will only see people closing them when a police control is in sight. (You better close it then because the police will charge you for an opened seat-belt.) The law also says that a Nissan is not allowed to carry more than 14 passengers. However, there is always space for one more (or a goat or a chicken!)

There is a matatus that drives from Rongai to Nakuru and back charging 70KSH for one way.

If you want to travel through the country or even through the neighbour countries like Tanzania and Uganda going by bus should not be a problem and is probably the cheapest way. There are many different companies and you will find a great variety. Some are very luxurious and include free drinks and biscuits while others will not offer you more than an uncomfortable seat and four wheels (more or less). Reliable companies that can be found in Nakuru are: Akamba, (which you can see at the right side of the highway when you enter Nakuru), Easy Coach, (Kenyatta Ave., close to the first round about) and a company that runs 10-seated Nissans, called Mololine Shuttle, (opposite Odeon cinema). A trip from Nakuru to Nairobi will take about 2 ½ h and costs 260-600KSH. To Kisumu it might take about 3h to get there and it will cost you the same price. Make sure that the makangas can not overcharge you (which they try very often when they notice that you are taking this route the first time).

If wanting to go to the coast from Nairobi, find one of these bus companies and buy your ticket a couple of hours in advance. It is best to travel overnight as you arrive first thing in the morning. The trip to Mombasa from Nairobi is about 10 hours with one stop on the way. 'Akamba' is another good bus company.

It is better to ask the price from somebody not to do with matatu before embarking, to get a fair fare.

Things to do during free time:

Initially we did not really know what to do with ourselves in what seemed to be a lot of free time. We read a large number of books, kept up journals, adapted to cooking (and cleaning) for ourselves and walked around the farm becoming accustomed to the layout. However, when we settled in we

found ourselves constantly busy: visiting people on the farm, doing exercise, listening to music, swimming and having bikes enabled a great deal of freedom. We are now able to quickly venture to the bars: 'Trust', 'The Small Joint Inn' etc. and the legendary 'Secret Café' – situated between the garage and post office with cold sodas and arguably the world's best chips. At weekends we frequently went to Nakuru or went on trips to the national parks, Gilgil, Naivasha, Lake Baringo, and Bogoria etc. In Nakuru there are two main nightclubs: Coca Savana and Dimples, but we would advise you to get to grips with Kenya before venturing into these clubs: they are an experience.

Lamu:

If you have a couple of weeks definitely go and see the coast, it's a long journey but well worth it. We recommend Lamu a tiny Island off the coast. It is a very Muslim community with no cars and the entire islands electricity is generated off diesel.

Transport there is quite easy. Once in Nairobi take the MASH bus too Mombasa for about 800 shillings depending on how smart the coach is, whatever you do don't take any other coach though as MASH is cheaper, more comfortable, has aircon and has good suspension which is a necessity considering the road runs out totally in places. We took it overnight so to get into Mombasa in the morning. From Mombasa take the bus too Lamu, we advise you not to stop at Malindi as the centre although pretty is not very nice and it is difficult to find transport from Malindi too Lamu.

Once in Lamu stay in the Casuarina a basic guest house which costs 500 shillings a night and is on the water front. The accommodation is basic but clean and the staff are very helpful, but book this well in advance. In Lamu you will get bothered a little by the hawkers trying to sell you stuff. These guys are like none we have seen in Kenya, they come across as very genuine and almost trustworthy but they will rip you off, but very subtly, so watch out.

Try and take a Dow trip they are really good fun and you have lunch on the beach, it should cost between 600 and 800 but no more, so haggle. Also visit Shella beach, you can get a boat to it for 100 shillings, it really pretty and relaxed. There are only two main pubs on the island, we only went to Petley's (its on the sea front – you will see it walking past) because we liked it so much, but don't go downstairs go upstairs, its far nicer you may need someone to direct you on how to get to the upstairs part. As there are only the two bars everyone goes there so the atmosphere is great. Another great place is coconut juice garden it has the best juice on earth and the food is very cheap, filling and wont give you food poisoning, it is just on the 'main street'.

Other people on the farm:

We found the people extremely welcoming on the farm and in Rongai. Johnny and Helen tended to be the first we called on when in a difficulty and acted a bit like adopted parents whilst still allowing us complete independence. For things obtainable through the farm such as gas etc. Hamish (the farm owner) is the person to liaise with. All are extremely accommodating and willing to help in any way they can. Simon and Anabelle are the closest permanent neighbours being only 100 metres across the field. They are most friendly, always inviting you over to watch rugby. We had some cracking evenings there what with all the dogs and the two boys charging around. The best way to re-pay their generosity is to offer to record any rugby if they are planning on going away, and a nice gesture is to bring your own beers.

There are also several other couples on the farm including the Potgieters (Willy and Nickie), who have a daughter Katie, who is the same age as us (18). They are also most kind, often inviting us for supper/drinks. They will probably allow you to use their computer which is a godsend as it is far quicker than any internet café and saves a trip to Nakuru. Rubin is the gardener and is very useful for the odd job in the house; also he will frequently bring round veg from Emma's patch. Rubin can also arrange for Fatima to come, clean the house and occasionally cook for 120 shillings for the day. However she speaks very little English so perhaps use Rubin to translate for you. She may not be needed but it is good to employ her none the less, she came to us once a week. If you want eggs go to the Potts - they have the best eggs on the farm. We recommend going to collect them at the weekend.

Teresa is yet another very generous lady who lives near Johnny and Helen. She too offers supper every now and then, sometimes accompanied by a film.

Also it is often quite fun to have people over to your cottage for a cuppa, or a beer and if you are feeling up to it a meal. We invited round the Onslows and it proved to be a really good humoured evening, furthermore they brought round cold beverages which I am sure you will find very welcome, having lived without a fridge for a while.

We also did a cooking course with Helen (who has a professional experience in this field). As a way of re-paying everyone's kindness, we invited everyone over one evening for drinks and nibbles.

Food:

Most basic foodstuffs can be obtained from Rongai (bread, Blue Band margarine, rice, pasta, fruit and veg etc.) but any luxuries are obtained from Nakuru – our advised supermarket is Uchumi or Ukwala because it is quite cheap but most on the farm use Gilani's. Both are very easy to

locate on a trip to Nakuru. The fruit and veg market in Rongai is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The house is self catering but with no fridge. It is possible to use Simon and Anabelle's but it is best to avoid too many perishable items. Cooking will depend on what you make of it: commonly pasta with tomato etc. for us, but try making chapattis.

Drink:

The first time you buy beers or sodas (soft drinks such as coke, sprite etc.) you will have to pay a deposit on the bottles which is refundable on their return. A crate of sodas (you can mix and match between Sprite and Coke etc.) costs around 350 Ksh and a crate of Tuskers (national and best beer) is around 3500 Ksh (deposit included). If offered the local brew, 'changa', kindly refuse as you will go blind at best. For tea and coffee we bought UHT milk because it lasts longer.

You can buy mineral water from the Gogar farm at a cost of 256 ksh for 18.9 litres.

Nakuru:

Do not judge Nakuru on your first few visits, its great once you find your way around and find good caf es. Furthermore you can buy cheap fake DVD's and CD's on the roadside and its quite fun haggling with them. Also the veg market is great for picking up fresh food, rather than some of the rather stale stuff in Rongai, this is very close to the bus stop.

The first time you go it can be quite daunting. Make sure you keep your money safely and walk with purpose. Uchumi and Gilani's are just off Kenyatta Ave. and should be easy to find. There are also various cafes including good coffee at the 'Nakuru Coffee House'. There is a Barclays ATM but the 'Bureau de Change' is open rarely. The best bank is Barclays but Visa and MasterCard work in most ATM's. The best currency is Sterling or Dollars. We recommend that whilst at the school you bring cash cards and some of both currencies. Travellers cheques are not especially useful and can cause a lot of hassle. Money and other valuables can be kept in a safe at Johnny and Helen's house.

The best internet caf e is 'Dreams' in a shopping plaza next door and upstairs to Uchumi. The first time you visit, a 'Lonely Planet' guide is very useful for both Nairobi and Nakuru, but you do not want to be seen using it as you will be marked out as a tourist and are likely to be hassled.

If you are looking for a good club experience go to the Summit resort. Its two miles out of town but is by far the best club in town.

Places to eat: The Courtyard (situated near Gilani's) is a good place for a nice sit down. While Topsy's is a good fast food restaurant, try the random spicy circular chips. Coca Savana however is a very nice bar, where there is football and pool tables, but the food is not great, but there is a night club there till six the next morning we are told (Do not order the masala it will blow you away). A good place to stay although basic, the Tropical lodge near Gilani's was adequate and a room cost 300 ksh and we fitted 5 in it.

Budgeting:

We spent about £40-£50 (approx. 4000 kshs) per week but this varies wildly on tastes, excursions, the type of food you eat. You will find imported items expensive, but you could get away with spending a lot less if you wanted to. In Rongai you will find basic food such as vegetables very cheap. Ten shillings will buy you a bucket of potatoes or ten tomatoes. Bulk buying in Nakuru also helps save money. It was nice to have some luxuries and it made everything more comfortable. Similarly it is nice to take beers etc round to peoples' houses or have them over for supper since they are always so hospitable. As an example this can add to costs. The price of trips also varies but they are invariably expensive. This weekly figure includes sundries such as gas, the cleaner (very nice and effective lady called Fatima), batteries for a radio etc. If you are here for longer than three months you will need another visa obtained from Nyayo house in Nairobi costing 2200 Ksh. The initial visa cost \$50 and although you can get them at the airport, we strongly advise to get it prior to arrival to avoid a lot of hassle. For the updated visa you will require two passport photos.

We lived on a budget of 500ksh a week each, which was enough to buy food. Using a kitty is the best and fairest way to manage the food and drink bills. However if we went out on the weekend we may spend up to 7000khs.

Bicycles:

Bikes are provided. They are traditional looking 'Raleighs' which are very effective but constantly need repairing because of the terrain. You can fix most problems at the Onslows but if not feeling up to it, the best place to get them fixed is just up the hill from school (Gogar) at the small shop with the man in green overalls. They really are essential for mobility and were a 'god send'. Ours should be passed down but if you have to buy new ones spend a bit more on better quality. (There are now three bikes for volunteers to use, buying is not necessary however repairing will have to be done constantly.)

10ksh for a puncture repair, 250ksh for a new inner tube.

Electricity:

Plugs are the same as in the UK. There are sockets with an extension lead to charge phones etc. or run the music speaker off. There is lighting in all the rooms too.

Excursions:

Often at the weekends we found ourselves busy or too tired to go further a field. You may find things are put on for you by Sister Hiltrude or the other staff or even people on the farm but there are many areas of natural beauty nearby. Again a 'Lonely Planet' guide to Kenya is very useful. We would advise taking some time before and or after teaching to travel. There is a lot to see and not that much opportunity during term time. Try and go to Lake Elementaita, the coast or maybe a bit of safarriing if you can afford it, although a lot depends on personal taste.

We preferred Eldoret to Nakuru as a town. Its 3-hour matatu ride away and has some good clubs and restaurants. Stay in the new Lincoln Hotel.

Safarriing is a must in Kenya if you haven't done it before. The nearest Game park is Lake Nakuru. We did it very cheap by hiring a Vehicle with camping kit and camping over a weekend. Between 5 of us it cost us no more than 65 pounds each. N.B Try not to get stuck in the mud or you will come face to face with the Kenyan corruption problem

In General:

Be optimistic with haggling, if they say 300 shillings try 150 and go from there. Anywhere without price tags you can do this, even in main shops. With haggling it can be quite effective to walk away but not with taxi drivers. Do not haggle with public transport. Matatus have going rates, if in doubt ask the other passengers what they are. Public transport is sometimes unreliable. There can be random delays due to breakdowns, jams or large crashes, so leave time either side of your expected travelling time for this. However it is quite rare.

Taxi drivers in big towns and cities like Nairobi or Mombasa are very useful, so if in a pickle find one and they will no doubt take you to the correct place, like bus stops or booking areas. However in terms of cost you will need to haggle very energetically. In Nairobi we found prices for travelling in the centre should be about 200 shillings and if you are travelling out of central Nairobi you should expect to pay 400 shillings. Around the drivers don't act too clueless as they will rip you off, perhaps tell them you live locally and you know what it should cost. 'Jatco' taxis are great if in Nairobi. You can ring them, tell them where to pick you up

and where to drop you and they will quote you a fixed price over the phone. The number is 0204440162.

Corruption is something we came across very rarely, however does happen as you are a tourist and if you are white you will be targeted even more. Usually it is police on road check; they will try and appear threatening and may ask for your passport, which is NOT needed whilst travelling in Kenya unless in a National Park. They will essentially try and make things difficult for you – In short this is them asking for a bribe. Whatever you do not bribe them. The most effective techniques for getting them off you backs are to confuse them by: Talking very fast, giving them random bits of paper, like the info for your hotel or something, inform them that you are a student, or ask them for their ID. If you do some of these things they should back off.

Beggars are very common around Nakuru and Nairobi especially. Don't give them money, as they will hound you every time they see you and make careers out of begging, which is dreadful for the Kenyan economy. Just realise that they will not mind if you refuse them money.

In the House buy Doom spray to ward off those annoying little flies. If there is a hairy caterpillar don't pick it up as you will break out in a nasty rash, just coax it out with a magazine. Bring travel wash as you will have to wash your cloths. Fatima can do most, but it is rude to give her underwear and finally on arriving in Kenya buy a Zain/Safaricom Sim card as it is very cheap to text only 10 shillings to England and 2.5 Shilling within Kenya and if people want to call you from England the best way is if they buy a card from either a post office, internet or general store called Go Bananas or find a number on the internet that reduces costs if punched in before your number (it is free). The reception to the UK is bad you need to talk as if it's an intercom as there is a large delay before the person on the line can hear you. It is perhaps best to inform the people you are contacting by phone of this as it can be very confusing otherwise.



Essentials to bring:

- Head torch
- Music
- Shirts and trousers for teaching (Non-Whites)
- Trainers and another pair of smart shoes
- Sunscreen and after sun
- A good camera and batteries
- Malarials
- A good hat
- Other obvious necessities (underwear, wash bag etc.)
- Books
- A FRIEND (You are highly likely to have a miserable time if you come on your own)
- Mosquito repellent
- A set of smart casuals.
- A Set of labour clothes
- Easy to clean clothes. E.g trousers without many pockets.

Our experience:

The first few weeks were quite difficult to settle in and adapt to the lifestyle. This was perhaps due to an effort to live off a shoestring budget and learning how to live more primitively in a small African village. Things became easier when we moved into the current accommodation; we spent a bit more generally, became more adept at cooking and got on better with everyone on the farm and at the school. Essentially everybody was very friendly and similar to entering into any new community; it is

likely to take a bit of time. By the end of it we had integrated both in the farm community, but also into the African rural community. In many respects this is a very privileged position and a real 'eye-opener'. Also with time we became more competent with teaching, got to know the children and the experience became more satisfying and rewarding as a result.

Overall, we had a fantastic time, which was extremely worthwhile and a brilliant experience. It is very rewarding and we feel pleased to have done it. It was also amazing to have the opportunity to live in a different country, with a different culture and surroundings. It sounds like a cliché, but much of your experience will depend on how much you are willing to put into it.

Other advice: Get your hair cut before you leave England as the World beauty salon is Rongai doesn't know what scissors are, and instead of giving a nice trim they left me (Toby) with a hair with bits 3" long and others bits 1" therefore I had to get it shaved grade 2.

Advice about schools:

Before arriving think up worthwhile projects e.g see-saw for VGS, that you could put into place, you only need ideas but if you arrive with no ideas things will never get done. Also think up things to do in lessons especially P.E and creative arts.

- Dom and Doug
- Nick and Matts
- Rob, Toby and Brett
- Wrightie and Jimbo
- Alex and Hugh
- Ness, Georgia and Sally