



Visiting Your Sri Lankan TWIN School

A TWINS PROGRAM GUIDE

Visiting your TWIN School in Sri Lanka

A visit to your TWIN school in Sri Lanka can create the perfect opportunity to strengthen and enhance your partnership. Our Field Officers frequently get asked about Sri Lankan culture and what visitors may expect when arriving at their TWIN school. The following information will assist you to prepare for your visit to your TWIN school and ensure both schools have positive outcomes from the experience.

Communicating with your TWIN School

When communicating with the TWINS Coordinator of your Sri Lankan TWIN school please always send a copy of the correspondence to your TWINS Field Officer. Copying your Field Officer into your communication enables them to monitor the relationship, follow up on outstanding tasks and also helps us to minimise any potential for corruption. Our Field Officers regularly undertake needs assessments of all TWIN schools in Sri Lanka and can communicate this information to you. You can also request your Field Officer to pass on any information or requests either school may have. If a teacher approaches you and requests financial or material support, please inform your Field Officer so they can check this information against their needs assessments.

What you can expect when visiting your Twin School

Every visit to a Sri Lankan school is unique but the school will normally put a great deal of time and effort into welcoming you. Your first day will typically include a tour of the school, a meeting with the TWINS Coordinator and Principal and a welcome Assembly that will often involve many speeches and traditional dances by students.

On arrival at your Sri Lankan TWIN you may be greeted by children offering you a small pile of beetle leaves. This is a special Sri Lankan blessing. When offered these leaves, it is appropriate to take the leaves with both hands, lower your head a little and respond with "Ayubowan" which is the Sinhala word for 'may you have a long life'.

The use of titles when addressing people is important in Sri Lanka. Sir and Madam is widely used and children also often use "teacher".

Students and staff will understandably be very curious and may have many questions about your life and country. It is not uncommon for people to be very direct, they may openly comment on your age, your size, your marital status or how much you earn. These comments are not intended to offend!!

Dress

It is important that you dress conservatively when in Sri Lanka, particularly when visiting your TWIN school. Make sure pants or skirts are below the knee and that shoulders are covered. Female teachers traditionally wear Saris in Sri Lanka, while the male teachers wear long pants and collared shirts. Some female teachers from abroad have enjoyed a sari shopping outing with their Sri Lankan counterparts. The climate in Sri Lanka is very warm and humid, so loose cotton fabrics are ideal.

What to chat about...

Visitors have found it very useful to bring visual aids with them to help encourage communication with their TWIN schools as the English language abilities of teachers and students is often very limited. Some useful things to bring along can include photographs of your school, local area, students, homes, animals etc. School magazines, postcards or traditional games will also be appreciated.

Good topics to discuss with older students and teachers can include cricket, festivals and local traditions, games, sports, food, family members etc. You can also arrange through your TWINS Field Officer to hold a little presentation about where you come from. This can help break the ice and prompt questions from the braver students.

Sri Lankan people are usually very proud of their country. They tend to take a simple and unquestioning pride in their island, its national achievements and (especially) their cricket team. Criticisms of Sri Lanka are not usually appreciated. Please refrain from getting involved in any discussion about politics or the current security status of the country

Personal Contact Details

Avoid giving your personal details such as home telephone number, email or address to students or teachers not directly involved in your TWINS link. This can sometimes encourage requests for individual financial assistance. If unsure, speak with your Field Officer and they can assist with forwarding on letters or emails to you.

Gifts for your TWIN School

If you would like to present your TWIN school with donations during your stay please discuss this with your Field Officer prior to your visit. They can then make sure there is adequate time to conduct a needs assessment within the school. Rather than bringing funds with you from abroad, please use our regular donation channel or let our Field Officers know if they can assist in purchasing items with you while in Sri Lanka.

To ensure your Sri Lankan TWIN school understands the intent of your trip to Sri Lanka, please complete the 'Visiting your Sri Lankan TWIN' questionnaire. This information will be passed on to your TWIN school so they can prepare for your visit. This also helps them to understand your interest in the long-term educational benefits of the twinning program rather than just donating materialistic goods. We don't want to encourage the general assumption that all western people are rich and would rather like to point out that you too have worked hard for being able to visit Sri Lanka.

Presents which are often appreciated include pictures of your home town/school/friends,

letters, art work (which will most likely be decorating the class room for many years to come), photos/paintings of your native animals and plants, maps of your home country. The children and teachers will be very interested in learning more about the country you come from and your customs and beliefs.

English learning materials will benefit the children greatly and will have a positive long-term impact at your TWIN school (please ask beforehand what facilities your school has, to avoid bringing things like CD-Roms to a school which hasn't got a computer). Please note that there is a big range of English learning material, books, pens, etc. for sale in Sri Lanka and you might find it cheaper and logistically easier to purchase these items once you are in the country. Our Field Officers will be happy to assist.

Shipping material items from abroad to Sri Lanka can be very costly and AdoptSriLanka can not take on the responsibility of collecting these items from customs in Colombo and delivering them to your school. Discuss this with your Field Officer as quite often it will be cheaper to organise purchasing items from Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan teachers often request copies of your curriculum or lesson plans and activities. These items will be highly valued if you are able to bring them from your country.

Local Customs

Always use your right hand when eating, pointing or shaking hands with people.

You may have moments of confusion when witnessing the 'Sri Lankan head wobble' which resembles our head shake for 'no' but actually means 'yes' or 'ok' in Sri Lanka.

Children may kneel in front of you and place their heads to the ground as a blessing and sign of respect. If this happens, touch them lightly on their head with your right hand before they rise.

Religious Customs

In Buddhist schools you might find a shrine or an image of Buddha. Never have yourself photographed with a Buddha image (i.e. with your back to the image). Children may also kneel in front of you with their heads bowed as a sign of respect. If this happens, you can use your right hand to lightly touch their heads to return the blessing.

Western concepts of privacy are little understood in Sri Lanka whose culture is based on extended family groupings and closely knit village societies. Natural curiosity usually expresses itself in the form of endless repeated questions, most often "Where are you going?" closely followed by "What is your country?" and "What is your name?". It is important to stay polite and remember how potentially negative an impact any rudeness or impatience on your part will have on perceptions of foreigners.

If you are visiting with your partner please be aware that overt physical displays of affection in public are frowned upon.

Photographs

Sri Lankan people, particularly children, love to have their photo taken –it is still important

that you ask first, if using a digital camera, to show them the result.

When taking pictures outside of the class room please always be careful about what is in the background. Photographing soldiers, policemen or military installations is against the law and serious penalties apply.

Handy Language Hints

The most widely used languages in Sri Lanka are Sinhala, Tamil and English. The majority of TWIN schools teach in Sinhala Medium (sometimes with special subjects in English Medium). People you meet in Sri Lanka will really appreciate any attempt at speaking Sinhala with them. They are also very forgiving if your pronunciation is not quite up to standard so have fun with the phrases below during your time in Sri Lanka!

Bohoma Istootie	Thank you very much
Kohomada?	How are you?
Hondai	I'm good
Ayubowan	May you have a long life
Mage Nama _____	My name is _____