



Society for Mahseer Conservancy

CORBETT TIGER RESERVE

FACTSHEET

FOR STUDENT'S, RESEARCHERS & VOLUNTEERS

The following fact-sheet will give full, honest and accurate information on all elements of your stay with us.

Please read all of it very carefully as it is very important.

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1 Who We Are

Society for Mahseer Conservancy is an Uttarakhand based conservation organisation addressing grass root conservation issues specific to wildlife and community based interests of the region. In partnership with host communities, forest department, eco- lodges of the area and several national and international agencies, Society for Mahseer Conservancy stands as an example that conservation issues can be effectively addressed if there is a sincere will.

The Mahseer Conservation initiative began around 2004 after local naturalists identified a need to protect and conserve the stretch of the Ramganga River leading upstream out of Corbett National Park. Bringing in the Corbett Tiger Reserve/Uttaranchal Forestry Department, the Eco-Development Committees of the villages along the river, and of course the villagers themselves they formed a partnership to eliminate the persisting environmental degradation from destructive fishing methods that had been increasing in the area.

A tripartite agreement was formed that assigned over previously nonexistent angling rights of 24kms of river to the private entrepreneurs. In return they would provide direct financial and employment benefits to the communities living directly alongside the river, and hold events to stimulate environmental awareness. The 24km stretch was divided in to 4 beats, and beat associations created to manage each beat. Key strategies and legislation were then implemented, resulting in restoration of a uniquely diverse and special river habitat and ecosystem, and the local inhabitants appreciated, co-operated with, and tangibly benefited from, the river conservation scheme.

The project is now not just been acclaimed as a rare success in Indian conservation circles, but also received a surprisingly favourable amount of positive media and publicity coverage. We now have expended to set up more volunteer research based initiatives, see below.

Our Camps

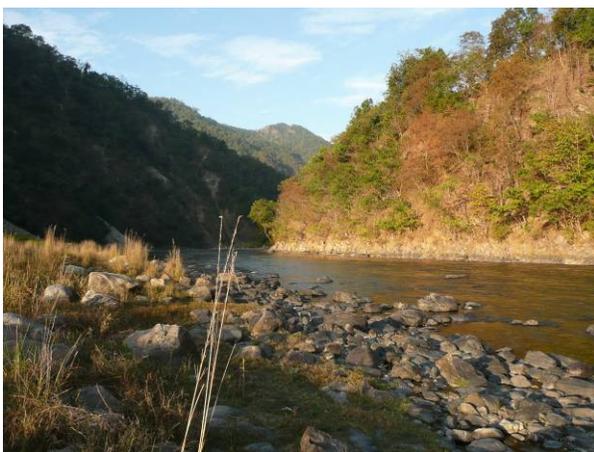
Vanghat Riverine Woods

Vanghat Riverine Woods is an eco-lodge catering mainly to birdwatchers, anglers and wildlife tours. 4 years ago we founded the successful and widely-acclaimed community-based Mahseer Conservation scheme, which has now restored a large stretch of river eco-system.

We had been running conservation and eco-tourism based volunteer program for 3 years of those years. Vanghat Riverine Woods, or Vanghat (which translates as riverine woods) as it is commonly known, is one of the four beat associations that form the Mahseer conservation scheme, and has been visited by many well known conservationists, including amongst others Ruth Padel, a conservation and wildlife author and great-great- granddaughter of Charles Darwin.

Before the construction of Riverine Woods the river valley floodplain was extensively populated by the invasive foreign bush species *Lantana camara*. This species is unpalatable to most endemic herbivores, and out-competes native species and acidifying the soil. We have cleared a sizeable area and replaced with native grasses, bushes and trees to restore this habitat. The lodge has also been running a snake rescue, relocation and education program for since early 2008 in the Ramnagar area.

The Ramganga at Vanghat



Vanghat Riverine Woods



Vulture Center

Vulture Center is a new project by Mahseer Conservancy that sticks very closely to the combination of community-based tourism and conservation. The camp is made up of a single, community-owned, traditional house with basic facilities which operates as a dual purpose village home-stay and research base for our conservation volunteers. Home-stay concept works on the basis that a family can receive guests with virtually no change to their daily lives and the income provides them with an alternative to selling their land and moving away. Camp Vulture is situated in the village of Ringora which is made up of only about 24 households, and is situated a short walk from the scenic and perennial Kosi River.

Vulture Center Cottage



Kosi River, a 2 minute walk



Our Volunteer Projects

- 1. Gyps Vulture Colony Monitoring and Conservation***
- 2. Forest Use Survey and Firewood Reduction Program***
- 3. Habitat Restoration and Afforestation Scheme***
- 4. Environmental Awareness Program***

2 Where You Will Stay

Volunteer accommodation is provided in the form of home-stay accommodation in the rural villages on the eastern periphery of Corbett National Park.

Home-stays provide the host-families with regular and long-term income and enable our organization to provide subsidized lodging and resources to volunteers to partake in conservation research and actions. The home-stays we are currently providing are also used to accommodate higher per-night paying short-term guests.

The home-stays we are currently operating vary between each other. The home-stay at Dhikuli is in the form of a newly-renovated self contained apartment upstairs from the family (even equipped with broadband and a small office for all volunteers to use).

The authentic mud-cottage at Ringora which is a village inside the Corbett Tiger Reserve offers a different experience to the volunteer. There is no mains electricity or water in the village so the cottage has been equipped with solar-powered lights and fans, and water must be collected from a nearby spring. The village also comes as standard with wild tigers and elephants passing within metres of the cottage nightly (the village has an electric fence as a safety measure though).

Corbett National Park is in the state of Uttarakhand, India.

UTTARAKHAND BASIC INFORMATION

State Capital:	Dehradun
Languages:	Hindi, Garwhali, Kumaoni
Population:	8,479,562
Mountain Cover:	93%
Forest Cover:	64%
Currency:	Indian Rupees (INR)

The nearest town to Camp Vulture is (10km) is Ramnagar, Uttarakhand.

Sleeping Quarters

You will have a pillow and mattress provided, but you may wish to bring your own sleeping bag for camping excursions. Indian beds are very hard by western standards, however all beds have a comfortable foam mattress. You may be required to share the room with a member of the same sex. Some villages have no electricity supply so the area is dark at night so please bring a torch.

Bathroom and Shower Facilities

As stated above the bathroom facilities vary a great deal from home-stay, however as a general rule apart from at Ringora in the tiger Reserve there will be a clean, private and hygienic bathroom for volunteers. The pot may be Indian style (crouching position) but will be fully flushing and the shower may be in the style of the Indian bucket bath.

It is important to stress that although at times basic, home-stays offer an unbeatable opportunity to gain unique first-hand experience of living in a traditional rural Indian community. The village has very friendly, safe and natural atmosphere and volunteers will find the most welcoming and charming hospitality.

3 Food and Drink

Bottled water is provided for all drinking water needs, at no extra cost to the volunteer. Tea and coffee making facilities are also available at camp. Soft drinks and alcoholic beverages are excluded from the cost.

Food is provided to volunteers by the family. Breakfast, lunch and dinner is prepared and served by the hosts every day, and is simple wholesome, mostly vegetarian and hygienically prepared traditional Indian cuisine. Typical dishes include curried lentils, potatoes, mixed vegetables, kurd, rice and flatbreads

4 Climate and Weather

The climate in Uttarakhand is very varied, going from extremely hot on the plains to extremely cold in the mountains. In and around Corbett there is three very pronounced seasons;

Summer	_____	<i>March - June</i>
Monsoon	_____	<i>June – October</i>
Winter	_____	<i>October – March</i>

Summer climate is hot and dry. During May and June the day temperatures reach around 40°C, and the nights are also warm, around 25-30° C.

It is advisable to bring wide-brimmed hats, loose cool clothing, appropriate factor sunscreen for strong sun, and to take a lot of hydrating fluids regularly. *This is the best time for mammal viewing.*

Monsoons or the rainy season lasts from June to September, during which time only Jhirna zone of Corbett National Park remains open. June and July are hot and humid, August till October is however slightly cooler and quiet pleasant. *This is the best time for reptile and insect viewing.*

Winter season lasts from November to February. The temperature is very varied being warm in the day at around 20°C to going below freezing at night.

Volunteers coming in winter will definitely need to bring some warm layers of clothing, hats, gloves and a coat that protects from the wind chill, as you may well be travelling early in the morning in open-top 4x4's jeeps. *This is the best time for bird-watching.*

5 Available Facilities

Communications

Long distance telephone, fax and internet cafes are available in Ramnagar. Mobile phone service (GSM) is provided by Cell One, Airtel, Hutch, Idea and so "roaming services" provided by all major telephone companies work in Ramnagar, as long as your mobile is unlocked.

Medical

All basic health care facilities are available. The government hospital and a couple of nursing homes are not as good standard as European or American hospitals, however they are required by law to use safe and sterilized equipment, and medical stores are well stocked.

Volunteers must obtain personal medical travel insurance.

Money

INR (Indian Rupees) is a restricted currency so you will not be able to change money before you come. Delhi airport has two bureau-dechanges immediately after clearing passport control, look to the right as you go through. It is not advised to try and change money elsewhere in the airport.

Traveller's cheques are not accepted. There are ATM counters in and around Ramnagar, and money transfer facilities by Western Union are available. Credit cards aren't of much use.

Dollars and euros are accepted in many places but this will increase the cost to you.

An approximate guide to the exchange rate is
50 INR = 1\$ 60 INR = 1 Euro 70 INR = 1 pound.

(These rates are a rough guide as of 1st Jan 2009 and are obviously liable to fluctuation)

6 Health and Safety

Vaccinations and Diseases

For routine vaccinations for India (tetanus, hepatitis strains etc) if you have not already done so you must contact your local doctor at least 2 months prior to arriving.

In terms of more serious diseases we should not give advice as to which vaccinations are necessary, consult your doctor, but in terms of *malaria and rabies* both are rare but very occasionally present in the area.

You can greatly reduce the small risk of either by following preventative advice such as keeping mosquitoes away with insect repellent and coils for malaria, and avoiding stray dogs or monkeys for rabies.

Some people do suffer 'Delhi-Belly' or bacterial/amoebic dysentery, although most bouts often last less than 24 hours and taking thorough hygiene precautions bring down the risk quite substantially. Most serious stomach illnesses are water-borne so only drink bottled water.

Crime against the person is low in India compared to most countries but nether less please exercise alertness and care, especially at night.

7 Hints & tips

Essential Items to Bring

1. Binoculars
2. Personal Laptop
3. Walking shoes
4. Sandals for wading in the river

5. Sleeping bag
6. Pens and Paper
7. Roll mat
8. Personal medicines (including mosquito repellent etc)
9. Camera
10. Flashlight
11. Water purification tablets and filter

Tips

- Bring a pair of good binoculars 8x40 are reasonable for the jungle, and a good torch as you will need this to move around at night
- Flights are cheapest if booked at least 2 months in advance, www.skyscanner.com is quite useful for searching cheap flights quickly
- Ask for some smaller denominations of INR (100s & 50s) at the bureau-de-change, very few places have change for 500s or 1000s
- Watch-out for pick-pockets around busy stations and tourist areas.
- Getting a visa is fairly straightforward but also can take a little time if processing errors occur so do not leave it later than a month.
- Winter is probably the best time for bird watching, summer for mammals and monsoon for reptiles.

Recommended Reading and Field Guides

Man-Eaters of Kumaon, Omnibus Part 1 & Omnibus Part 2,

Jim Corbett, *Oxford University Press*

The first omnibus gives exciting tales of hunting man-eating tigers and leopards around the turn of the last century in the Kumaon by the legendary Jim Corbett, as well as having very descriptions of the states scenery, landscapes and culture. Omnibus 2 is a very good account of the lifestyles of rural people in Corbetts time and gives a good insight into the culture in the jungles and mountains.

Birds of Northern India,

Richard Grimmett & Tim Inskipp, *A&C Black Publishers, Ltd 0-713605167-9*
Excellent field guide for all birds in Northern India.

Birds of the Indian Sub-Continent,

Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp & Tim Inskipp, *Oxford University Press*
Field guide for birds which may be more suitable if you are planning to visit the north-east or south India. This book is widely available here at Corbett at most reasonable prices.

Birds of Prey of the Indian Subcontinent

Rishad Naoroji, *Om Books International, ISBN 8187107699*
The most comprehensive, detailed and illustrated book on Indian raptors available.

A Field Guide to the Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent,

KK Gurung & Raj Singh, *Academic Press, 0-12-309350-3*

A nice field guide for Indian mammals, including pugmark identification pictures.

Indian Wildlife,

Insight Guides, *Apa Publications GmbH & Co,*

An illustrated overview of the Indian and Nepalese natural environment and wildlife, also with sections on National parks including Corbett.

Snakes of India the Field Guide,

Romulus Whitaker & Ashok Captain,

The best field guide for Indian snakes by the star of 'The King and I' documentary.

8 Important Points to Consider

PLEASE CONSIDER THESE POINTS VERY CAREFULLY.

Climate and Clothing

Consider when you are coming and bring appropriate clothing and equipment. You must be prepared if coming between March and September for very hot or hot and humid weather.

Clothing should also be neutral jungle colours such as green, brown, beige, camo or khaki. You are asked to bring suitably conservative clothes, as scantily clad people (bare shoulders, cleavage, legs and arms) are very much looked down upon.

Accommodation

The accommodation is outlined in detail above, but you must be prepared for extremely different and basic accommodation and facilities. Although this is what makes the whole experience unique and worthwhile, functioning as a part of such a community is quite different from a western lifestyle, for example having to walk a short distance to obtain water.

Food

Although most people will have tried Indian cuisine, the local vegetarian food provided for volunteers, whilst delicious and wholesome, will be exactly what the local people eat. Local food is also always spicy and does not have a wide variety of different dishes

Different Customs

Local customs may also seem strange at first to an outsider, and foreigners seem strange to local people also. Rural villagers are polite and sensitive people, and can be easily shocked so please be prepared to dress and act accordingly.

Culture Shock

The area is very rural does not have pubs, bars or nightclubs. The village is small and the people curious towards foreigners so please be prepared for this innocent curiosity, rather than taking it as rude or intrusive. The poverty level (especially in cities) shocks some people.

9 CODE OF CONDUCT

- Drugs and extreme alcoholism is unacceptable
- Anti-social behaviour is not tolerated
- During hikes in the forest you'll be accompanied by a camp guide.

- Hikes after dark and night fishing are not permitted.
- Respect for local customs. (Will brief on arrival).
- We are governed by rules and regulations of Corbett Tiger Reserve and expect volunteers to respect that.
- No loud music or shouting after dark

Extreme flouting of these rules can result in the termination of the volunteers stay and all costs being non-refundable.

Important- You'll be under probation for a month from the day of arrival. In case your conduct is not acceptable your services will be terminated with immediate affect.

10 **Your Role as a Volunteer**

1. To conduct field research for the Deforestation Survey and work with villagers on sustainable alternatives.
2. Field monitoring and awareness of vulture colonies and survey of the prevalence of Diclofenac.
3. Guests relation and slide show presentation on the local flora and fauna at Tiger Camp & Vanghat Riverine Woods.
4. Helping with the general running of the lodge if needed including cooking & housekeeping.
5. Assisting with computer related matters.
6. Keeping a photo record of places you visit in the area (please note if ever used for any publication purpose you'll be given photo credits for the same).

Please see our separate Projects Details Factsheet for more detailed info on the projects.

11 Travel Options

Visa

Non-Indian Volunteers will almost certainly need to obtain a visa.

If you do not have one you will not be allowed to enter India.

The type of visa is you obtain is entirely up to the volunteer, however a 6 month tourist visa is the most commonly obtained. Please check the internet or a travel guide to find out how to apply for a visa.

(www.vfsglobal.com for UK, France, Australia and a few others)

Coming to India by Flight

To reach Uttarakhand from anywhere in India it is virtually essential to come through Delhi so if coming from abroad a flight to Delhi is highly recommended. Volunteers are expected to book their own flights.

Upon arrival at the airport, volunteers are advised to take a **pre-paid taxi** to the railway station or other destination in Delhi, booths are inside the airport directly ahead of passport control.

It is not advised to take taxis outside the airport, as the chances of being scammed or driven around Delhi to people's shops are high.

Transfer by Private Taxi to Ramnagar

Depending on your convenience arrangements can be made to pick up volunteers directly at the Delhi International Airport (or Delhi Hotel) and if you are coming by train; from Ramnagar or Lalkuan railway stations.

Please note that pick up from Delhi will cost around 4500 INR approx 60 GBP which may be more convenient if you're flight arrives between 10:00pm and 6pm the following day as there is only one train from Delhi to Ramnagar which departs at 9:40pm in the evening.

Self-Drive by Road

Travel by self-drive is not recommended as it is expensive, difficult due to insurance and international driving permits and also problematic due to the drop-off for the hire car. Ramnagar is 240km from Delhi, via Moradabad.

It is also extremely inadvisable for anyone without prior experience of driving in India. Save yourself a lot of stress and don't.

Transfer by Train to Ramnagar

Train is preferred by many since it is comfortable, convenient and economical. Please be advised that the train may be cold as it's a night train so take something warm. Check www.indianrail.gov.in for availability and prices, and www.irctc.co.in for booking.

Please note you may want to book a couple of weeks in advance to guarantee availability, please contact us if you want help getting round the site.

Delhi to Ramnagar:

Train number 5013 Ranikhet Express, departs Old Delhi railway station at 2245 hrs and arrives at 0500.

The II AC compartment of this train is comfortable, don't get in the first few carriages as these split and go somewhere else. Ramnagar and Delhi are the last stops on the line.

Ramnagar to Delhi:

Train number 5014 Ranikhet Express, departs Ramnagar railway station 21:40 hrs and arrives Old Delhi Railway Station 05:00 hrs.

Transfer by Bus

There is regular bus service from Delhi (Inter State Bus Terminal at Anand Vihar) to Ramnagar. The bus takes around 8 hours, is relatively comfortable and costs around 150 INR.

12 Project Cost

The cost is inclusive of:

- Breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- Bottled drinking water.
- Accommodation at Camp.
- Toilet paper.
- Personal guide/assistant for all field surveys.
- Operations.
- All transport for field work.
- All required survey equipment.
- Safety briefing and training.

**Total cost per person per day on single share: - INR 668/-
(Approximately 11 Euros)**

**Total cost per person per day on double share: - INR 468/-
(Approximately 8 Euros)**

Exclusive of:

- International flights or transfers to Ramnagar.
- Snacks or extra food other than the meals provided.
- Soft drinks.
- Alcoholic beverages.
- Personal travel insurance.
- Incurred medical bills.

13 Contact Details

Sumanta Ghosh / Oliver Gray-Read

Address: Tiger Camp,
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Phone: +0091 971 924 3939
+0091 963 958 4325

(From a UK landline call 0844 439 93 93 first, then enter the number for 3p per minute, www.dialaround.co.uk for details)

Hopefully this has provided you with everything you need to know.

Please feel free to ring us up for a chat about anything at all.

Corbett is a very special and magical wildlife area, and we look first for a positive and fun attitude in a volunteer, so if that sounds like you then we very much look forward to hearing from you and seeing you here soon!