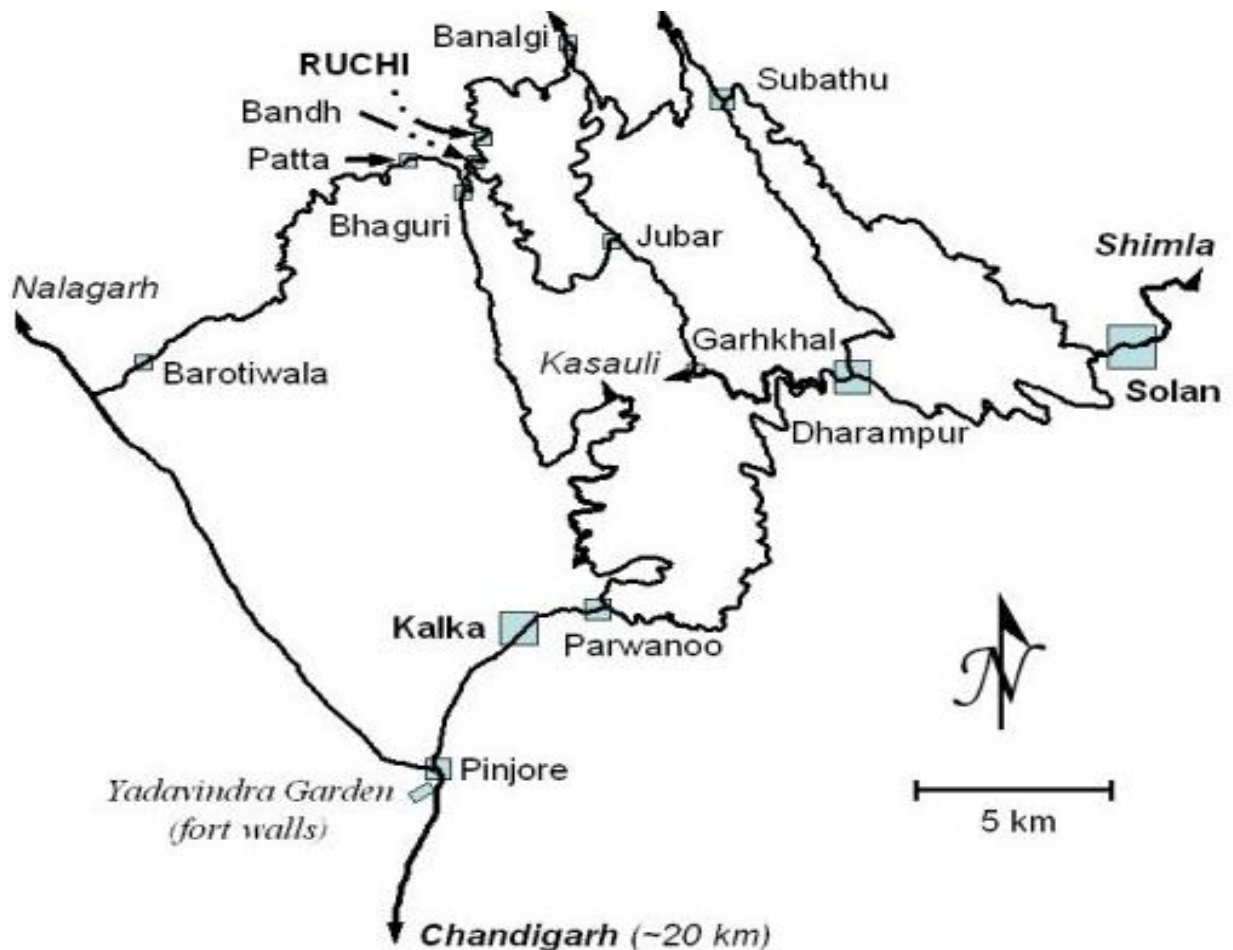


Life at RUCHI- what to expect

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Himachal Pradesh is located between the hot plains of Punjab and Haryana, and the huge Himalaya of Ladakh and Tibet. RUCHI is located, and works, in the southwesterly Himachal Pradesh districts of Solan and Sirmour, an area of government-owned forest and small, privately owned farms. The main RUCHI complex is associated with the nearby Bandh village. Although Bandh is unlikely to be located on any atlas/map, it was added to WikiMapia in 2007 by a TOTEM volunteer (www.wikimapia.org/#y=30958916&x=76917300&z=15&l=0&m=h&v=2). Nearby towns that may be found on a common atlas/map include Kasauli, Chandigarh and Solan. The latter two are approximately two hours drive from the main RUCHI complex, while Kasauli is closer. The local area is very hilly, with spectacular views across valleys dotted with villages and terraced farmland. The RUCHI complex is located at an altitude of 900 metres.



CLIMATE/WEATHER

Temperature Details (2007):

Months	Mean max.	Mean Min.	Average
January	18.69	4.27	11.46
February	19.45	5.95	12.78
March	23.51	9.77	16.80
April	29.06	15.06	22.16
May	37.00	25.00	31.00
June	36.00	24.00	30.00
July	29.92	21.70	25.75
August	29.08	19.02	25.04
September	29.42	18.62	23.88
October	27.57	13.33	20.36
November	24.07	7.88	15.93
December	14.18	5.36	13.11

Rainfall:

The average annual rainfall is around 990.00 mm (Data: 2007) out of which 60% is received during monsoon months (June to August). Little rainfall is also received during January, February and March.

ACCOMODATION

For, TOTEM VIP volunteers: Each volunteer will get a twin bedded room and will be shared with another volunteer, with an attached bathroom. Bedding is provided.

OTHER volunteers/visitors: Dormitories with 4-5 beds will be available. Toilets are common.

Each room has a ceiling fan for comfort during the hotter months, personal storage, and flyscreen doors and windows. There are also internal bolts on the doors and windows, and an external padlock with key. There is no heating for the cold winter nights.

The attached bathrooms contain western style toilets, cold shower facilities, and a tap for receiving a bucket of hot water. You will need to bring all your own toiletries. One towel is provided.

The main set of accommodations has room for 8 people. Additional accommodations are available but lack some of the conveniences in the main set.

There are a variety of games available for RUCHI volunteers. In the dining area you will find: a carom board (an Indian board game like pool but using your fingers instead of cues!) and monopoly. There are also badminton racquets and a cricket bat to enjoy at your leisure. The dining area is also equipped with a TV with mainly Indian channels.

FOOD AND WATER

Breakfasts consist of either an Indian dish (Two-minute noodles, sweet porridge, parathas – potato chapatti) or western style foods such as toast and cereal. It is possible to obtain western style spreads such as jams, peanut butter and marmite. Breakfast is generally served between 8.00 and 9.00.

Lunch and dinner mainly consist of dahl (different types of pulses/lentils) and spiced vegetables, served with rice and chapatti (flat bread). Staff understand that volunteers may not be accustomed to very spicy

food, therefore hot spices are used sparingly. Seasonal fruits are available. Lunch is served around 13.00 and dinner around 19.30.

Long-term volunteers should be aware that RUCHI is located in a relatively remote area, and the availability and variety of fresh produce is dependent on season. The nearest supermarket with a good selection of western style food products is in Chandigarh, as is the nearest market with a very large selection of fresh produce.

The water at RUCHI itself can be considered safe, as the source is a nearby protected spring. However a UV filter is provided in the dining hall to further ensure all drinking water is safe. It is recommended that a drink bottle of this water is taken when on daily site visits, to avoid taking local water. Bottled mineral water can be bought from many of the local stores. Tea/coffee facilities are available, and snack foods are readily available at local stores.

CLOTHING/ FOOTWEAR

Clothing required will be based on the time of year of the visit. It is best to check the climate information above, and bring clothing according to your needs. Indian style clothing is not a necessity, but as a general rule, volunteers should dress conservatively.

The year can be divided into three main seasons. October to March is the winter season, when the climate is very cold (especially October to January). Woolen clothing and polypropylene is required, particularly once the sun sets. April to June is the summer season, and is generally warm and dry. Lightweight clothing is best for the summer season. July to September is the rainy season. If the rain is persistent over many days, it can become cold, but is otherwise warm. A good rain jacket and umbrella is essential during this season.

Specialised hiking boots are not required, unless you wish to go for large treks in the surrounding hills, or pursue treks in the Himalayas in your own time. However, sturdy, good quality walking shoes, with good grip, are recommended. On many occasions site visits to villages can require a walk of up to 1-2 kilometres from the road. These walks follow established tracks, but these tracks are often over rough, rocky terrain. The hilly nature of the area also means walking up and down some steep hills. Sandals/jandals are also recommended for around the RUCHI complex, and during hot weather.

TRANSPORTATION

It is best to discuss your transport arrangements from Delhi to the RUCHI complex with RUCHI management prior to your arrival in India.

Daily transportation to and from sites for Personal Development placements (three weeks TOTEM VIP only) will be arranged by RUCHI staff, and this is usually by means of bus or RUCHI vehicle. For all placements more than 3-weeks the volunteer is required to cover his own travel expenses. At no stage will volunteers be required or requested to drive any vehicle. The local roads are narrow and winding, and the local bus drivers and RUCHI drivers have excellent experience driving in these conditions.

COMMUNICATIONS

1. Telephones:

RUCHI puts at the disposal of volunteers a mobile phone on which they can be reached (on request). Recharging this phone is the responsibility of the volunteer.

You can buy international calling cards, which are available from any of the larger towns in Himachal Pradesh, and use these on the RUCHI phone. "BSNL India Telephone Himachal Telecom Circle" ISD/STD/LOCAL card is a good option. Calls to most of the countries with this card are approximately 10

rupees per minute. Note that the telephone connection at RUCHI may be out of order for a few days at a stretch, so the following two alternatives should be considered.

If you are considering buying a mobile phone connection in India, the BSNL and Airtel Networks are best for this area, being the only networks with coverage at the RUCHI campus. You will generally be able to get reception of most networks whilst in the field. It is best to purchase mobile SIM cards or calling cards in Himachal Pradesh State to avoid roaming charges. RUCHI can provide additional advice on request.

Public telephone booths for national and international phone calls are extremely common all over India – just look for the STD/ISD/PCO signs. Calls worldwide cost approximately 10 rupees per minute. There is usually a screen where you can monitor the length and cost of your call. The nearest telephone to RUCHI is at Patta or Bhaguri (approximately 45 minute walk or fifteen minutes by bicycle).

2. Internet:

Internet facilities are currently very limited and volunteers should not plan to rely on regular internet use.

The nearest town to access the Internet is Subathu (a 1 hour 15 minute bus journey). This dial-up internet connection is okay for email and can be found at the top of the main street on the left as you walk down. Typically, they will charge you 30 rupees for one hour's use.

Alternatively, one can use the internet at Solan (two and a half hours by bus) as well as Chandigarh which has broadband internet services.

At RUCHI there is a slow USB modem Internet connection. Note that the USB Internet connection at RUCHI may not be reliable because of office pressure on this lonely connection and other difficulties with the connectivity, electricity or computer. Consult the concerned person for availability and costs.

3. Post office:

There is a post office in Patta (50 minutes walk away), which can provide envelopes and postage stamps. The postal system is relatively reliable, and standard post, envelope size letters generally reach most places in the world in two weeks, at a cost of approximately 20 rupees. Mail has been known to take anywhere between one week and two months.

You should typically have no problem sending and receiving snail mail. RUCHI's address is: RUCHI, Village Bandh, Bhaguri – 173233, Distt. Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India.

4. Media:

There is a television available in the dining hall, which includes some channels broadcasting news in English. RUCHI have subscriptions for two regional newspapers in English, however their delivery is dependent on the bus service.

LANGUAGE

The predominant language in the State of Himachal Pradesh is Hindi. English speaking Indian people are fairly common in the larger towns; however this is very uncommon in the rural areas in which RUCHI is situated. On site visits for Personal Development Placements, a staff member should be with you to provide some English interpretation and explanation. Communication with local people is easiest by this means. For long-term Educational Placements, volunteers will need to learn to cope with less frequent assistance with Hindi-to-English translation.

A Hindi phrasebook is useful, and you can learn some Hindi through general conversation with staff. It is useful to learn and practice a few simple phrases during your stay, and the local people usually enjoy and support any interaction with you regardless of your proficiency in Hindi.

SECURITY

The District in which RUCHI is located is generally considered safe. The local people are friendly, and interested in you, and will provide a great deal of respect. However, there are some simple precautions and common sense that should prevail, and RUCHI staff will brief you on these upon arrival.

MONEY

The Indian currency is the Rupee. The Rupee is divided into 100 Paise, but these are rarely used. Very little money is required at RUCHI, except if you wish to purchase items from the local stores in Bandh, Patta, etc. There are no ATM / Credit Card facilities in the immediate area, so it is advised to carry some cash. The nearest ATM facilities are in Subathu (1 hour 15 mins by bus from RUCHI, for Cirrus cards only), Baddi (1 hour 30 mins), Solan (over 2 hours by bus), Shimla (3 hours 30 mins) and Chandigarh (2 hours). Chandigarh will be the best place for changing money and most of the banks are found in Sector 9.

If you are relying on Travellers Cheques, it is easiest to change these before you reach RUCHI and Himachal Pradesh. Whilst straightforward to change in places like Delhi, in Himachal Pradesh it is a cumbersome process and only possible at some branches of the State Bank of India.

WHAT TO BRING

With an interest in the RUCHI program, it is likely that many volunteers may have background experience or information that may be of interest and use to the RUCHI program, and volunteers are encouraged to share new ideas with RUCHI staff. Therefore it is useful to bring along any relevant hard copies of information (e.g. data CDs, books, research, etc.) should baggage permit.

The above information is relevant for your stay at the RUCHI complex, and does not include any optional travel/sightseeing/shopping you may wish to do. Good quality guidebooks such as Lonely Planet and Rough Guide provide excellent information on what travel gear to pack for such occasions. However, below is a list of useful items, specific to your stay at RUCHI.

Highly Recommended

- Travel Guidebook such as Lonely Planet
- Walking/hiking shoes – particularly with good grip
- Sandals/jandals – Excellent for hot weather, and around the RUCHI complex
- First aid kit – A travel doctor can make recommendations specific to India
- Small day pack – Good for daily visits to villages
- Water bottle
- Sunscreen
- Clothing to suit the current climate – Check the climate information, and email RUCHI staff or previous volunteers
- Cards/games/books/mp3 player etc. – Useful for passing the time in the evening
- Electrical adapter – Indian electrical plugs are the three round-pin type (220-240V)
- Photos from home to show staff/locals – There is a strong interest in family structure, your country's scenery and statistics
- Hindi phrasebook
- A small collection of songs to sing – The local people love to sing and dance, and it is a lot of fun to join in

SOME CONCLUDING ADVICE TO THE WISE...

Finally, please bear these points in mind:

Dress:

- Indians dress conservatively by Western standards. Please avoid excessive exposure of the body, especially in rural areas. For women, loose fitting clothing and an ankle length skirt or jeans are advisable. Dressing in a manner that hides your body will make you feel more comfortable and will help avoid unwanted attention from men with less than honorable intentions.
- At religious sites, it is considered respectful (and required for both men and women at Sikh temples) to cover your head. Women may find it useful to carry a scarf or bandana with them if they are planning on visiting temples.
- Remove shoes before entering religious sites or people's homes.

Use of the toilet:

- Western (sit-down) WCs are not available in villages and Indian type (squat) toilets are in use. In some cases, no toilets at all are available in the field.
- Conventionally, Indians do not use toilet paper. You may like to carry tissues or toilet paper with you.
- We do not encourage use of tissue paper in RUCHI.
- In RUCHI, if you must use them, please **DO NOT** put **toilet paper** and **feminine products** in the toilet as they may choke drains. Instead, place them in a bag and later on throw them in the trash bin.

Bathing :

- Showers are not always available. You may rather find buckets.

Eating:

- Indians generally eat with their hands. Before every meal, be sure to wash them! You can use the bread to help sop up any sauce left over. If you aren't comfortable eating with your hands, you can usually ask for a spoon (if one hasn't been provided). After the meal, wash your hands again.

- Leaving food on your plate is wasteful and a cultural “don’t.” So please, take what you need, but always eat what you take.
- Food is spicy and oily, but mostly freshly cooked at high temperature. Freshly cooked food is safe to eat in villages.
- Staples of the Indian diet include chapati (bread), rice, dal & vegetables. Indian food is tasty and liked worldwide. However, it can be quite heavy so avoid overeating in the beginning.

Drinking water:

- All the tap water at the RUCHI complex is safe as it comes straight from a nearby spring (you can visit it if you want!).
- There is a UV filter in the mess hall that can be used to further purify your drinking water
- When visiting the villages, you may wish to bring a bottle of filtered water with you, although there have been no complaints from volunteers about the drinking water in the past.

Gestures:

- If you wish to give a greeting in Hindi, say Namaste with folded hands.
- Indians do not generally smile or wave at outsiders and strangers. So, do not get offended if you wave and do not receive a response.
- Indians are not used to saying thanks for everything. Please do not take offense if you do not hear thank you from friends. However, thankful gestures are certainly appreciated!

Other customs:

- Smoking and drinking on the RUCHI campus is not encouraged for guests and staff.
- Culturally, young people do not drink and smoke in front of their seniors.
- When a group receives a bill (eg at a restaurant), payment may be shared in urban areas, but not in rural areas. The service provider expects full payment of his bill and not part payments from each individual for the same order. One group member should pay the bill, and then each individual’s share can be repaid later on.

Rules at RUCHI:

- RUCHI volunteers will follow RUCHI’s disciplinary rules and regulations, and behave in an appropriate manner while on the campus and in the field.
- Volunteers can spend time away from RUCHI if they wish, but it is necessary to consult RUCHI and there is no refund for the time away from RUCHI.
- If volunteers are to leave RUCHI before their agreed placement period, a refund for the remaining time will not be possible.