



## Visitor's Guide

### WELCOME TO AVANI!

*Considering to volunteer with Avani?*

Avani welcomes volunteers with specific areas of expertise or interest that can enrich the work Avani does. Please discuss the specific projects that you might undertake during your time with Avani.

Find out more about life in and around Avani's centres, so as to better prepare for your stay. Here you will find important information and tips concerning travel, accommodation and the local way of life so that you settle in comfortably and safely in the given socio-cultural context and spirit of Avani.

### STAY IN AVANI

Upon your arrival at the main centre in Tripuradevi, you will be welcomed by those living here, working here, and volunteering here. Someone from Avani will take you around the centre, introduce you to other team members, show you the campus and facilities and explain the daily routine followed on campus. S/he will be happy to answer any of your queries about local ways of life, campus rules, etc.

**ACCOMODATION FACILITIES** include private guestrooms or dormitories. In the dormitory, 2-4 people share a room. It is recommended that volunteers take up a bed in the dormitory as it facilitates wonderful interaction with the staff that lives on campus. Generally, different sexes are separated; however, couples are able to stay together in a guest room and their privacy is respected.



**ACCOMODATION COSTS** include lodging and food, in addition to the maintenance of general facilities such as the water supply and washing machines. Please confirm the current tariff with staff at Avani.

**MEALS** are served three times a day. The food is normally seasonal, vegetarian and, of course, Indian. Tea is served in the morning and evening.

! At the end of every meal, each one washes their own plates.

! Filtered **drinking water** is available from taps inside the kitchen and near the dormitory. In the winters, drinking warm water is advised to avoid falling sick. Warm water is available only in the kitchen.



**TOILET ETIQUETTES:** Use of toilet paper is discouraged as Indian toilets are not designed to drain off toilet paper. All toilets are however equipped with flushes, a spray hose/ health faucet and a bucket of water. Dormitories have Anglo-Indian toilets and the guestrooms have Western toilets. Since our septic tanks are not designed to destroy toilet paper, if you do use toilet paper, please make sure you bring it to the compost pit rather than throwing it in the toilet. This will only choke the toilet.

**SHOWERS:** Campus activities are all aimed at conservation and sustainability. Bathing therefore involves using buckets and mugs rather than showers. If you are an international volunteer, Avani also encourages you to wait until your arrival in India to buy ayurvedic toothpaste, shampoo, moisturising cream, that are easily degradable.

**LAUNDRY:** Washing machines are available for laundry purposes. Avani encourages the use of soapnut powder for washing clothes. Soapnut powder suitable for machine use can be purchased at the Avani campus. Weekend launderers may have to que!



**GARBAGE DISPOSAL:** Dormitories and guest rooms have dust/disposal bins. On campus, waste is segregated into three categories: biodegradable waste, soft plastics (e.g. food wrappers), and non-recyclable waste (such as hard plastics and electrical products).

**FOR MENSTRUAL WASTE:** The campus has an *incinerator for disposal of menstrual pads or tampons*. Please enquire with someone from our team to understand how this functions.

**OFFICE SPACES** are available for volunteers in the “volunteer office”. This is equipped with desks, chairs and a dedicated broadband internet connection.



**HOLIDAYS** – Sundays are the weekly day-off for the administrative staff and volunteers on campus at Avani. Weaving centres, located in Tripuradevi and other villages, remain open seven days a week. If volunteers want to take some time off, they must discuss this with the team they are working with and their field coordinator to ensure reallocation of tasks, if necessary, and to avoid any confusion.

## LIFE ON THE AVANI CAMPUS

India's traditions and customs are different from those in the West. Avani is situated in a traditional region, very rarely visited by tourists. The locals in the villages are not very accustomed to being in contact with people from different cultures and other countries, so it is important to respect their habits and customs. Observing is often the best way to learn and to adapt yourself. Also hoping that every volunteer that spends time in Avani tries to be as much as possible in harmony with the local environment and culture. Feel free to ask anyone from the Avani team about any doubts or problems!



## CODE OF CONDUCT

**Volunteers are expected to join** the daily chores at the campus or field centres such as tending to the farm, contributing to the community kitchen, in cleaning activities & in any other possible work in and around campus. Volunteers residing in the dorms are required to clean the common spaces in the dormitory including dorm toilets, at least once a week. These chores are organised and allocated on a weekly basis in discussion with the *shramdaan* team.



**Water** is very scarce on the Avani premises. Avani harvests rainwater and recycles as much water as possible, with some amount of our potable water being trucked in from afar. It is an urge to conserve as much water as possible.

Out of respect for nature, **please avoid bringing plastic trash or chemical products to Avani.** You can buy cloth bags on every corner of the street in Berinag and elsewhere in India. In general, try to reduce the amount of waste you generate.



**Hygiene protocols:** Avani is in a rather remote region, under sober and rudimentary conditions. The natural and not sanitised environment that Avani is in may easily attract bacteria and germs. Therefore, maintenance of personal hygiene by each and every person is extremely important. Treat your small wounds and infections as soon as they appear. Also maintaining this hygiene with extra vigilance in the kitchen! **Wash your hands** before every meal, as this is considered very important for personal hygiene.

Use of **intoxicating substances**, such as alcohol, drugs and tobacco is strictly prohibited on the Avani campus and in the field centres. Since the local community identifies any foreign face in the area with Avani, it is encouraged to abstain from such activities off campus as well. Volunteers who choose to smoke should do so discreetly, on the lookout for curious visitors and children. Rules that apply inside the centres (dress, substance use, etc.) are also applicable outside the centres. Each one must be careful about their behaviour in Berinag or in the villages they visit.

It is important to note that the local people living within this region have fairly traditional attitudes and it is generally not considered culturally acceptable for people (particularly women) to be seen wandering around the streets at night. For this reason, kindly **refrain from leaving the Avani campus after sunset.**

**Gifting:** If you would like to give small gifts to the people at Avani, it is strongly recommended not giving money! This is necessary to keep human relations outside of any monetary expectations. After all, it's not gifts that people need the most. Love, respect and sensitivity are the most beautiful gifts that you can give them, and you will get lots of it in return.

### **LOCAL ETIQUETTE**

Most **spoken language** here is Kumaoni/ Pahari (local language) and Hindi. However, everybody will be happy to speak in their basic English to you!

Since Avani is located fairly remotely in the Kumaon Himalayas and engaged in working closely with the local community, it is necessary that all the volunteers remain sensitive to the socio-cultural context of the area. It is therefore advised that you dress modestly in clothes that are neither very short

nor too tight. It is expected that the volunteers be **dressed modestly** and appear clean & neat.

**! Males** - Men can wear t-shirts, shirts, or a kurta; as well as trousers, a dhoti, or shorts to work in. Men are required to wear long trousers when away from the centre (e.g., when in Tripuradevi or Berinag), as well as at special occasions (holiday celebrations, weddings, concerts). Avoid going bare-chested.

**! Females** – Anything with sleeves and covering the hips is acceptable on campus. Salwar Kameez is a common outfit and can be easily purchased in the local market. The salwar is a loose pair of pants (comparable to trendy harem pants) and the kameez is a long top reaching down to the knees. Avoid tight-fitting clothing, sleeveless tops, short skirts and exposed midriffs.

**Respect** is essential for all the people who live and work in the centre (workers, employees, volunteers, visitors, persons in charge). Greet each other with a cheerful “*namaste*” by folding our palms together. Hugging, kissing and other such modes of greeting are strongly discouraged. You may make people rather uncomfortable!

**Taking off one's shoes** is another form of respect. Shoes are removed before entering most buildings (houses, holy places). Stretching your legs towards someone while you are being seated on the ground, as this is considered very rude. Therefore, while sitting on the floor cross-legged or squatting is encouraged. Alternatively, pull a stool!

**A non-violent approach**, both verbally and physically, towards children and other people is absolutely necessary. It can only be achieved through patience and lots of love. If you face any problems with the team to which you are assigned or with anyone else on or off campus, it is suggested you approach your field coordinator first and then other senior team members if the problem remains unresolved. There is a grievance redressal committee which can also help with such support. Please ask any senior members for the name of a committee member. Alternatively you can drop a written grievance in the Grievance Box located outside the accounts office.

Several people from near and far visit Avani and often without notice. Visitors stay all day, sometimes several days. Respecting the visitors and the way Avani receives them is important for the relations of the project. For the same reasons it is also important to keep the premises of the centre clean, including the rooms and workshops.

Not only volunteers, but also trainees, workers and staff and their respective families live at the centre. Each one lives like a big family and there is very little personal space. You need to like living in a community!

## **COMMUNICATION**

**TELEPHONE-** It is possible to acquire a prepaid sim card from Indian mobile service providers such as MTNL/BSNL (government run), Airtel, Vodafone-Idea or Reliance Jio. Of these Reliance Jio and BSNL have the widest coverage. Airtel & Vodafone-Idea sim cards have networks at most of our field centres, and also near the entrance of the main campus. A SIM card can be purchased from the shop in Tripuradevi (Deven Da's Shop) or kiosks/ shops in Berinag. Purchase of a SIM card requires you to submit several personal documents. For international volunteers, it is advised that a sim card is best purchased in Haldwani or Delhi.

! Only airtel sim cards are available at the Delhi airport and the activation of sim cards takes 12 hours.

**INTERNET:** Broadband internet is available across the entire Avani campus in Tripuradevi.

### **POSTAL SERVICES:**

**Shipping to Avani:** Only regular Indian-Postal service can get things all the way to Avani. The well-known international shipping companies (FedEx, DHL, etc.) usually cannot deliver packages to Tripuradevi (or Berinag), despite claims to the contrary. Let the office staff at Avani know that you have a package coming, so they can help make for a smoother landing. *Amazon-India* delivers orders (mainly prepaid) to the Avani campus. However, in some cases e-retailers have been known to cancel orders due to Avani's remote location.

**Shipping from Avani** – You can post letters from the post office in Tripuradevi and ship packages from the post office in Berinag. Shipping packages internationally can end up being quite expensive. Finding packing materials can sometimes be surprisingly difficult. Ask folks at Avani for help in putting together a package to send.

### **IMPORTANT NEARBY LOCATIONS**

► **Tripuradevi (Avani is located)** is a small village offering limited postal services, small snacks, vegetables, chai, basic services: copy, fax, SIM cards, recharge cards, phone calls. This is the village where Avani is located.

► **Raiagar (2 kms)** is a small village at an important roadway junction. Raiagar offers more services and goods than Tripuradevi. 20-minute walk is the closest stop for things you might not be able to find in Tripuradevi.

► **Berinag (4 kms)** is a larger bazaar (market) centre which offers more services and goods, including medical services and medicines, clothing, basic postal services, a bank with ATM, basic hardware, a variety of fruits and vegetables, as well as restaurants, sweet shops, etc.

► **Almora (100 kms)** has all necessary services. You should be able to find anything you need, including banks, internet cafes, international phone booths, markets, postal and courier services, general stores, well-equipped pharmacies, etc.

### **MEDICAL PRECAUTIONS**

► **Vaccinations** - Consult with your local physician or with a travel clinic in your area about the vaccinations you should/ are required to take before travelling to India. You should check on the Indian embassy website for any vaccinations that may be required for your country of origin.

► **Medications** - Generally, nearly all medications are available in Delhi, and a fair variety is also available in the larger towns of Almora (4 hours from Avani) and Berinag (30 mins from Avani) in closer proximity. Be sure to pack a sufficient supply of any medications you require, if you prefer familiar brands from your home country. Bringing a first-aid kit, including bandages, antibiotics, etc., however remains a good idea while travelling anywhere in India.

► **Mosquito Repellent** - There are mosquitoes in Avani, especially around the monsoon season. It is much needed while participating in the farm activities on campus. It is recommended bringing a familiar brand of mosquito repellent with you when you travel.

► **Insurance** - You may wish to purchase a **Traveller's Insurance** if it is available in your country. Typically, this will supplement any existing medical coverage, may provide for medical evacuation if necessary, often provide some death benefits, may cover theft incidents, and may refund ticket costs should you require medical evacuation.

## PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP

### ► CLOTHING

- For summer (April through October) mainly light and cotton clothes, with a warm sweater for the evenings.
- During the monsoon season (July-September) you will want rain-clothes and/or an umbrella.
- During the winter, (November through March) **bring many warm clothes**. Dress in layers to prepare better for the cold weather. While it is often not freezing, facilities are not heated. It sometimes rains and there will occasionally be snow too in the winter season.

! Note that it is possible to pack lightly and buy clothing here in India, in Delhi, Almora, or even the local bazaars at Berinag or Raiagar.

### ► MONEY

- For your own safety, it is best that you do not carry a lot of cash with you. Carry enough only for your travel! An advice that you withdraw enough cash (5000-10000 INR per month over and above the lodging cost in Avani) when in Delhi/ Kathgodam/ Haldwani to last the duration of your stay here at Avani. The closest ATMs to Avani are located in Berinag.
- Previous volunteers have found that the ATMs in Berinag and Almora tend not to accept MASTERCARD (Maestro) cards. It is therefore advisable to bring a VISA card if possible.

### ► ACCESSORIES

- We recommend bringing a **portable flashlight** with its own batteries, or which uses rechargeable batteries.
- An additional bed sheet may be useful if you travel around.

- If you are travelling from a foreign country please carry the necessary plug converting devices. These are not easily available in Berinag.

We wish you a pleasant and memorable stay at Avani!