



# Ketapang Orangutan Volunteer Project with International Animal Rescue

**Location: Ketapang, Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo**

**Duration: 10 days, 3 weeks, or multiples thereof**

**Focus: Construction and maintenance of a rehabilitation and rescue centre for the orangutan of West Kalimantan**



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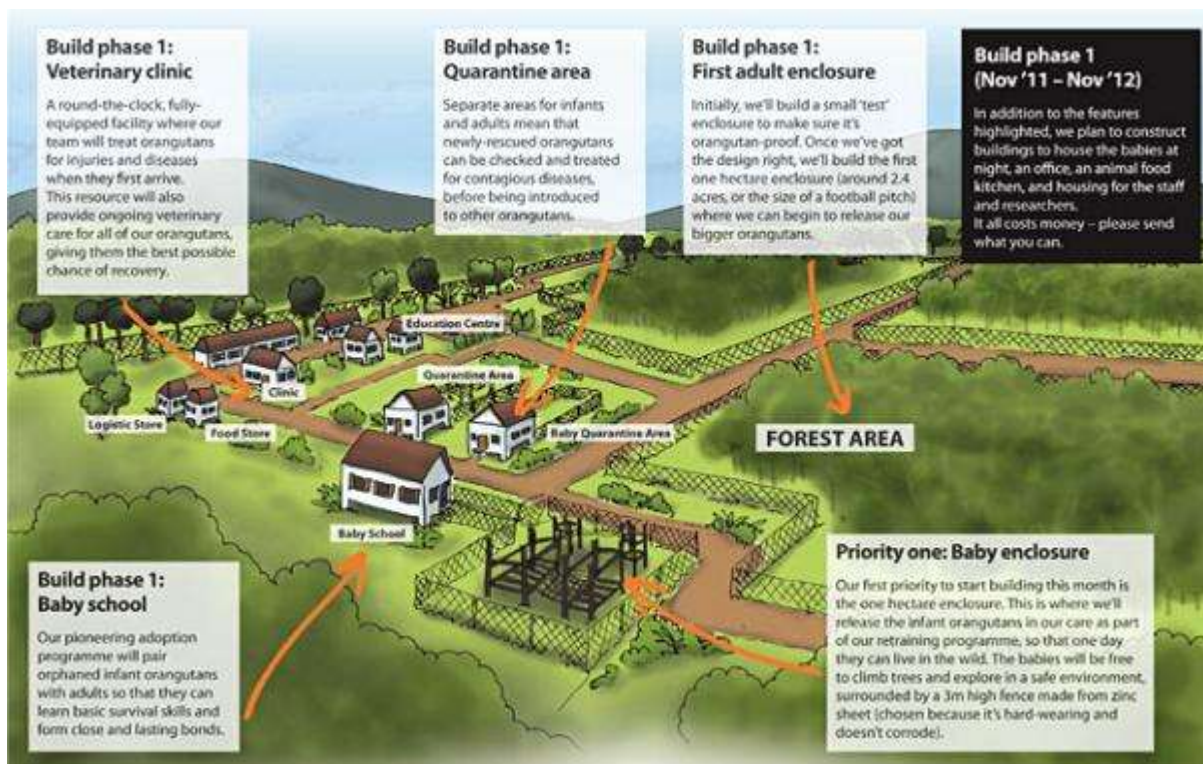
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## Project summary

In 2010, International Animal Rescue set the task of building a new rescue and rehabilitation centre for the orang-utan of West Kalimantan. Within three years, 63 orangutan were resident at the centre, which was not yet completed, showing the huge need for such a project in this location. Orangutan Project joined IAR on this venture, providing the service at which we excel – financial and physical assistance through a truly responsible volunteering program.

This volunteering program asks for participants who do not mind working incredibly hard to literally help to build a future for the orangutan of West Kalimantan, both those already resident at the centre and those that need protection in the wild. It will be a challenge, but one that you will find hugely worthwhile and immensely satisfying as you carry out physical labour of the type you have never done before, develop skills you've never used in your 'normal' life and leave a very tangible impact behind you.



For the majority of the construction, local building companies are employed as obviously skilled and experienced workmen are required. Volunteers sometimes assist the local workforce, though more commonly work on separate, independent projects that bring something extra and add value to the site. Now phase one of the new centre is complete, with all of the buildings operational, volunteers are still an essential part of the workforce as the centre continues to grow. With the purchase of adjacent land to be used as pre release islands and the ever-increasing numbers of rescued orangutans, volunteers taking part in this project are vital in expanding and improving the centre and continually moving it forward. One of our philosophies is that volunteers on site should *only* be providing a benefit; they should not be a drain on financial or management resources of the authorities and their presence on site should not have a detrimental impact in any way. We work very closely with our partners to ensure our vision is shared, but on the ground we operate as independently as possible to provide a positive impact without requiring their management time, which is best spent on their own (rather substantial!) tasks and goals.



## Who we are

Orangutan Project Sdn Bhd is a Malaysian conservation company specialising in operating meaningful and responsible tours and volunteering projects in order to generating funding for wider conservation objectives. Our work is currently focused on Borneo, and though the primary focus has historically been orangutan welfare and conservation, we are interested in helping any and all protected wildlife, wherever possible.



We are proud to present a model of truly non-profit eco-tourism, where funds generated by the volunteers and tourists that we work with are spent directly on our conservation and welfare work at the centres and in the areas that we are based. Though a lot of our work resembles that of charities or NGOs, we have chosen to operate as a non-profit company to promote a more charitable means of running a business. We see no shame in a company aiming to achieve a profit, but our choice is to spend that profit on a cause in need, and the cause we care **passionately** about is the plight of endangered species.



As stated above, we believe that volunteers should only be providing a positive impact to the centres and/or animals they wish to help. All too often, travel agents will sell the theory that by simply turning up and volunteering your time, you are being helpful by default. This is a model that allows the agents to make maximum profit for minimum workload. The truth is, the management of a volunteer program that provides both a tangible, positive impact to its location and a meaningful, memorable experience to the participant requires a team of staff dedicated

to the project on the ground. A team of English-speaking facilitators is essential, as well as all the equipment that the person will need while working (paint, brushes, shovels, wheelbarrows, work gloves, saws etc). Expecting the centres to provide all of this actually places a burden upon them and prevents them continuing their daily work.

‘Volunteering’ is perhaps a misleading name for the opportunity we offer to work with us at the orangutan rescue and rehabilitation centres. It is more than working for free – volunteers pay to join us on our projects, and through this fee are actually funding a huge amount of required materials, essential members of staff and works undertaken on the ground. Simply expecting to work voluntarily is not always useful. A successful, meaningful volunteer program takes a lot of hard work to manage, and rehabilitation centres are expensive to run. It is therefore the only logical model that a volunteer should make a significant financial contribution as well. Orangutan Project is a financially transparent company, and will happily share publicly any and all financial records, so you can be sure your money is used on the ground, at the centres, for the benefit of the animals you care about.



## Your role – general information

To participate on this project, a good level of fitness is required. The work is physical, and the heat and humidity add a challenging extra layer to this. Though there is a working schedule and plan for each volunteer group, please be aware you are coming to an operational rescue and rehabilitation centre, and we cannot predict what may happen each day, with potential new arrivals or any of the current orangutan under the centre's care. We ask that volunteers are willing to be flexible, and are tolerant of potential delays in or changes to the planned work as different projects may get re-prioritised.

You will also need patience as you adjust to **'Borneo time'** – volunteers often come to the project



with huge amounts of enthusiasm and energy to plough into the work, which is a massive asset and positively impacts on the energy levels of the full time staff. However, please be aware that within a four week project, you will simply be adding a helpful and necessary piece to a much larger puzzle, and you should **not expect** the world of orangutan conservation to make great strides forward in the timeframe of your project.

The Indonesian approach to work is also vastly different from the Western mentality. Speed and efficiency are replaced by relaxation and a distinct lack of urgency, regardless of the importance of the task. You will not change the mind-set of a nation in a short period of time, so please prepare to **embrace** this cultural difference rather than display frustration and/or incredulity at the local labouring techniques and ethos. Perhaps after a day or two of back-breaking work in 35°C heat, you may come to appreciate the more laid-back, relaxed approach!

Please be aware that you are coming to work at an animal centre in a developing country. Standards of animal enclosure may not be the same as those you have seen in extremely wealthy Western zoos. The situations in rescue centres are far from perfect, and many animals are kept in conditions below standard. Both Orangutan Project and IAR are fully aware of the best captive management, enrichment and husbandry techniques, though it is not always straight forward to implement what we know to be the ideal given facilities, funding, external support and available workforce.

You should remember that:

- If all conditions were perfect for the animals, there would be no on-going need for volunteer funds or labour at the centre. One of the reasons you are there is to facilitate the improvement of conditions for all the animals in the future.





- You can **always** ask questions – there are explanations as to why each individual animal has ended up at the centre, and is in its current housing. These reasons can be complex and varied, but we feel that to get the most out of your experience you should learn about some of the issues facing both conservationists and animal keepers in the developing world. Unfortunately, there is not a simple solution available for many of the animals that find themselves in centres like Ketapang, but both Orangutan Project and IAR are committed to Ketapang for the long term, with the hope to realise many improvements over time.
- It is not always possible to improve the conditions for one individual orangutan or group of orangutan in the short time you will be with us on the project. This is not to say we will not be working towards such developments in the future.



When with us, you are treated as temporary members of staff. We expect you to participate in any and all jobs that are required for the centre's maintenance and development. We do not necessarily save 'best' jobs for volunteers, or 'worst' jobs (though it may sometimes feel that way!); we will distribute your labour to areas in need of attention at the time you are with us, as we would with any member of staff. To this end, you may also get to witness events that are only the privilege of full-time members of staff: volunteers in August 2011 were able to watch the release of an orangutan from the centre into a forested area. Other volunteer groups have also been able to join the team on rescue and confiscation missions (taking a purely observational role of course).

You do not need any special skills or experience to be of use as a volunteer on this project. We have many years of experience creating programs and jobs that people from

all backgrounds can participate in and get real satisfaction from doing so. If people do come to the project with prior experience and skills, we will certainly try to make the most of this where we can, though it is not always possible. We generally create jobs and projects that anyone with a reasonable fitness level can help us with, as the majority of our volunteers do not have prior skills. It is therefore not always simple to reassign tasks and create projects to accommodate specific skills or requests, but we will certainly make use of builders/carpenters/welders/mechanics etc when and where we can!



## Your daily work

The work at this project site is always **varied** and often not the same from one month to the next. Most of the work is physically demanding and always outdoors, meaning you also have to cope with the tropical elements. You should truly be prepared for anything! Most of your days will be spent on construction or maintenance projects essential to advancing the construction of the new centre. Tasks completed to date by the volunteer project include:

- Digging out a very large, 600m long ditch for the purpose of providing a fire break in the forest for the security of the centre and the orangutan
- Installing perimeter fencing, requiring the mixing of many hundreds of kilos of cement by hand in the Bornean sun
- The construction of many feeding platforms and climbing frames as permanent in situ enrichment for the day areas used by the young orangutans resident at the centre.
- Construction of a colossal iron-wood tower in a forested area. This is for orangutan in the area to use, and also for staff to use as an observation area for viewing of orangutan and monitoring of the surrounding forests
- Provision and installation of electric fencing for all enclosures
- Preparation of accommodation, sometimes at rather last minute notice, for the arrival of new orangutan to the centre
- Creation of various enrichment devices, both in situ which will be semi-permanent inclusions to enclosures and disposable, single-use-only items for the orangutan's immediate enjoyment
- Planting of trees to reforest new areas of land to prepare them as future pre-release islands sites.
- Planting and upkeep on the farm area where food is being grown for the orang-utan including making organic compost.





During enrichment work you will have great opportunities to observe the orangutan and widen your understanding of their behaviours and characters. When working around the orangutan, you will be expected to follow best practise guidelines for volunteering with great apes, which include:

- **No physical contact** *at any time* with any of the orangutan. This is for two main reasons
  1. The aim of the rehabilitation centres is to return the orangutan to the semi-wild, or wild in some cases. Close physical contact with many different people has an extremely detrimental effect on the behaviour of these animals. Orangutan are very smart, and learn very efficiently through observation and imitation. Therefore, the more humans they are exposed to, the more they try to behave like us, rather than like orangutan, which only **impedes** their return to the trees.
  2. There is a very real risk of **disease** transmission from humans to orangutan (zoonosis), and in the 0-3 year old orang-utan, even a common cold can be fatal. Increasing the number of people who have close contact with the orangutan simply increases the chance that a potentially fatal pathogen is transmitted to these animals. Permanent staff that have contact with the animals are all subject to blood screening, which we do not insist on for volunteers.
- **Facemasks** are to be worn at all times when in close proximity to the orangutan. When participating in orangutan enrichment, you will often be just 2-3 metres away from the animals with only a cage between you. Therefore, a physical barrier to prevent the spread of communicable diseases is mandatory for all volunteers.
- No food or drinks (outside of the diet provided by the centre) to be given to the orangutan at any time.
- Always listen to and follow the instructions of your supervisor/the animal keepers/the rangers.
- When observing semi-wild orang-utan, do not take food or drink into their areas, keep a safe distance from the animal and always follow the directions of the member of staff you are with.

These guidelines are for the safety both of yourself, and the animals that you are coming to help.

For a volunteer program to truly be of the most benefit to the orangutan, the volunteers should not really even see the orangutan. The detrimental impact of habituation and humanisation on these animals cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, the media and charities, particularly surrounding orangutan rehabilitation centres and conservation, are saturated with images of white people hugging the animals, especially baby orangutan.



This creates the misleading impression that to be of use in a primate rehabilitation centre, all you need do is love the monkeys and fuss over them as you would a human child.

We are working to create a new model of tourism and volunteering, where the interaction with the orangutan is kept to an absolute minimum, yet the impact and educational value to the human participant is incredibly high.



## Stories of some of the orangutan – why this project is essential

### Pelangsi



An orangutan trapped in a snare survived for ten days without food or water before he was rescued by IAR's team in West Kalimantan. The young adult male was close to death when they reached him and cut him free. His right arm was caught in the snare which had been set to trap deer and wild boar. The orangutan had stepped in a loop of rope hidden under leaves on the ground which tightened and pulled upwards when he trod on it.

The rescue team sedated the orangutan, freed him from the snare and gave him fluids for severe dehydration before transporting him back to IAR's clinic in Ketapang.

He was given the name Pelangsi, after the area where he was found. During the first 48 hours his condition remained critical and he wasn't stable enough to undergo surgery. He had contracted septicemia as a result of the injury and infection in his hand. He continued to receive fluids intravenously and was also put on antibiotics and painkillers. The medical team worked around the clock to save him. He has undergone amputation of his hand and forearm and though there have been complications along the way, he has now been released back into the wild.

### Budi



Prior to his arrival at the centre, Budi had been kept for ten months in a chicken cage and fed only with condensed milk. He was obviously suffering from severe malnutrition and neglect, and he faced a lengthy convalescence. Initially every small movement of his body caused Budi pain, and the physical therapy he had to endure daily was torturous for him.

He overcame all his troubles thanks to the care of the team at Ketapang, and now enjoys time in forest school surrounded by other orphans that have become his friends.

## Oscarina



This orangutan was around 18 months old when rescued and was being kept as a pet in Sungai Duri, Bengkayan, which is miles away from Ketapang. Her mother was killed and the baby was sold to a family for 1 million rupiah (£74). They eventually decided to hand her over to the Forestry Department (BKSDA), quite possibly because she became ill. In accordance with the formal agreement between IAR and the BKSDA, she was then entrusted to the expert care of IAR's team of vets and keepers.

The baby had a very serious skin infection and was extremely itchy for the first days, as well as suffering from a fever. The vets started her on a course of antibiotics and other medication and she quickly started looking and clearly feeling much better. She also had very serious nutritional problems because she was being fed on a diet of meat, fried food, noodles and sweet tea. After receiving appropriate treatment,

the itching disappeared, she regained her appetite and learned to enjoy more suitable foods. She was put in quarantine for the six weeks, at the end of which she was socialised with other orangutan for the first time since she lost her mother. The baby had been thought to be male and so was known as Oscar. Now that she has been identified as a female she is called Oscarina.

## Monte



Monte is a male who was about 13 years old when rescued. He had been kept in a tiny cage and chained up for at least three, possibly five, years. He had been kept illegally as a pet by his owners since he was a baby.

In a cage the size of a kitchen cabinet he could neither stand up nor stretch his arms. He was chained up because as he grew and became stronger he was able to break the cage open and escape from his cruel confinement.

An initial veterinary assessment found Monte to be malnourished and weak. Karmele Llano Sanchez, IAR's Veterinary Director in Indonesia, said: "I wonder how he has even survived in such dreadful conditions for so long. He's the saddest orangutan I have ever seen. When today he arrived in the cage, his legs were weak and trembling as he tried to walk and climb just a few

metres off the ground. It is going to take some time before Monte can carry his own weight without a struggle."

## Andes



This baby orangutan was in critical condition after being rescued from an oil palm plantation by IAR's team in Borneo. Judging from the circumstances in which he was found, the poorly infant is clearly the baby of a female orangutan who died of her injuries after being savagely beaten. The lactating female had evidently been attacked while trying to protect her baby and rescuers had feared that he would never be found. However, workers at the plantation where the female had been found told the team he was being kept at a land clearing camp five hours drive away from IAR's centre in Ketapang.

At the land clearing area they found a small camp with a few bulldozers parked next to the wooden building. When the Forestry Rangers who had joined the rescue team asked about the baby, the plantation workers claimed to have found him when he fell from a tree. An orangutan of about eight months old was lying in a small cardboard box. He was painfully thin, malnourished and feverish. He was also very weak, very frightened and barely moving.

Orangutan of this age would never wander alone in the forest. The small baby had been at the camp for more than two weeks which ties in with the findings of the autopsy of the female.

## Puyol



The team rescued Puyol from Kelampai village where he had been kept as a pet for the previous two months. His mother had been killed with a machete and eaten and Puyol had wounds on his abdomen and right arm which were almost certainly inflicted during the attack. Puyol was being kept at the front of his owner's house, tied up by a rope around his neck and fed only on sugar cane and water. He is now resident at Ketapang.

## Rikina



This female is a baby of about 5 months old and goes by the name Rickina. She was rescued in Pontianak from a man who claimed that he encountered the mother orangutan with the baby in the forest, and that the mother was so startled that she abandoned the baby and ran away. The man picked up the baby and in doing so apparently caused a wound on her head with his machete. People in possession of young orangutan often claim that they have been abandoned by their mothers but this is almost always untrue: a mother orangutan will never leave her infant behind and will fight to the death

to protect her baby from aggressors.



## Where you will live

The accommodation will be basic, Indonesian style and shared, though we will try to ensure that each volunteer has their own bedroom. Due to the nature of this project, the accommodation changes occasionally and our ultimate aim is to have facilities on site at the rehabilitation centre itself. For the foreseeable future however, the shared house will be located closer to the town of Ketapang.

There are a number of bedrooms, a toilet, wash room, kitchen and outdoor area. The toilet is Indonesian style, by which we mean a hole in the floor. There is not a shower, rather more traditional washing apparatus in the form of a container full of water and a scoop/bucket. There is no computer or wifi in the house, but there is an internet café within walking distance. The house as a whole and facilities are certainly **basic**, though there have been no complaints from our past volunteers and we believe it is more than comfortable, as long as your expectations are correct.

Remember that Indonesia is a developing country, and incidents of human poverty are common. The very poorest volunteer on our project will be immeasurably rich by comparison, so please bear this disparity in mind when interacting with the local people. Be mindful of how you dress, as Indonesia is predominantly a Muslim country – if females walk around in shorts or short skirts with vest tops on you will certainly be stared at and likely cause offense.

However, be prepared to be stared at, whatever you wear and however you look, as Western people are still an incredible novelty item in Ketapang. Indonesians are very friendly by nature too, so be prepared for everyone to try to wave at you, talk to you, try and get a photo taken with you, or all of the above, when you venture into the town.

There are some beautiful beaches in the area, and close by is the national park of Gunung Pulang. You will have at least one free day in every week, and your project facilitator will be happy to arrange excursions. However, many volunteers are more than happy for a day simply sitting!

### **Cultural Considerations:**

- Do not point, except with the thumb.
- Do not touch people on the head (especially children).
- Take off shoes before going indoors.
- Never refuse food from locals you know
- Do not be confrontational. Locals do not know how to deal with this.
- Always remain pleasant-even when making a complaint.
- Customer service is not very good so patience is required.
- Locals are laid back and do not like hassle - pace of life is slow and nobody works too hard.
- Be aware that the local people in Ketapang will not speak English. Make an effort to learn some Indonesian, even if it is only a few words. The Indonesian people will be very excited to hear you trying out their language

### **Personal Safety**

You are travelling to a relatively safe area, though as with all places opportunistic crime can be a problem and theft of valuables can occur. There is a severe penalty (death) for taking and dealing in drugs. Volunteers should abstain for any drug taking activity. We hold a zero tolerance policy on drug use. Drinking alcohol is legal, but this should be done discretely, even at the volunteer houses.

It is recommended for volunteers to have a lock on their bags and to keep their most valuable possessions on their person. **Do not** bring or carry around large sums of cash.

# Your arrival day

## What to do when you arrive

Travelling via Jakarta with the Indonesian airline Garuda, you will arrive in Ketapang airport, which is roughly an hour's drive from the orangutan centre and about 30 minutes' drive to the volunteer house. There is no airport tax on arrival or departure that needs to be paid at the airport. These taxes would be paid with the flight ticket.

## When will we be met?

As long as you have provided your flight information to us and are arriving on the set start date of the project, we will be picking you up at the airport and failing unforeseen delays, will be awaiting you at the arrivals lounge. We will then drive you to the volunteer house in Ketapang, where you will be living for the duration of your trip.

- If you are arriving on the 9<sup>th</sup>, you will meet the rest of your volunteer group that evening and all have dinner together with our project facilitators.
- If you are arriving on the 20<sup>th</sup>, you will be joining some volunteers who have already been working at the centre for 2 weeks, and you will have a group dinner with them and the project facilitators on this day.

## What to do if we don't meet you?

It is incredibly unlikely that we will not be at the airport, awaiting you in the arrivals lounge. At worst, we may be a little late due to bad traffic or terrible weather. If we are running late though, and you'd like to call us to make sure we're coming, please use:

- (006) 0109029745 for Natasha Beckerson (she is based in Malaysia and this is a Malaysian number)

## Things to bring

- A torch – power cuts are a frequent occurrence
- Lightweight clothes that you do not mind getting dirty/ruined
- Wellington boots/gum boots – these are often volunteers' preferred footwear, though if you would rather not squeeze these into your bag, they are very cheap and easy to buy when you are there.  
However, tall people beware! Indonesian shoes are rarely found larger than an English size 8, European 42, so if your feet are bigger than this, you will need to bring your own.
- Long socks – our most frequent volunteer injury is 'wellie rash', or chafing of the gum boots on the lower leg.
- Mosquito net
- Books, iPods, pack of cards etc
- Sun cream
- Travel plug adapter – Indonesian sockets are two round pins
- Work gloves – something like simple gardening gloves, easily and cheaply available from hardware stores
- Poncho or waterproof coat – this is personal preference. If you are caught in a proper tropical downpour, nothing is really going to keep you dry! Lightweight cotton clothing will dry very quickly anyway, and we always find that an extra layer simply makes you sweat more, so you end up wet regardless.
- Money – you will probably not find much to spend your money on in Ketapang! This project is catered, though 'extras' like soft drinks, alcohol and snack food won't be provided. Therefore, you will perhaps need a small float, though you can also draw money out of ATMs in the town. Having more than \$100 in cash on your person is not recommended
- Telephones – there is good coverage at your accommodation so your mobile phones will work (though perhaps not at some of the sites where you will be working). Roaming charges, however, can often be horrendous. It is often worth buying a local SIM card when in country – they cost less than \$5, and international calls to landlines will be much cheaper than using roaming. It may be worth unlocking your phone before travelling, or alternatively very cheap mobiles phones (less than \$20) can be bought.
- The expectation to be hot, dirty and sweaty for most of the time!



Finally, we strongly recommend that you join our facebook group, [Project Orangutan](#), and get in touch with volunteers that have already participated on the project. They can give you an honest appraisal of their experience with us on this project, and can also provide you with general advice. We obviously think this is an incredible project and that you will learn a huge amount and have a fantastic experience - however, as its creators we are bound to say this! So please find our community of past volunteers and find out what they have to say

