



Durga's Den Visitor's Guide

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in Durga's Den. Before applying to come as a volunteer, please read the following information thoroughly to ensure that your time with us will be fulfilling both for yourself and for our organization. We appreciate your enthusiasm, but please allow us time to respond to your inquiry, as we have limited office staff and housing for visitors.

Durga's Den MISSION STATEMENT

Durga's Den mission is to create a space where individuals have a chance to develop and share their talents and expertise towards a sustainable life. We strive to find solutions to basic needs such as shelter, food and water, energy and community life.

LIFE ON THE FARM

LOCATION

Durga's Farm is within the site of Durga's Den and is located only 10 minutes drive from the town of Ocho Rios, on the North Coast of Jamaica. The closest airport is Montego Bay where you can find easy transportation by bus (\$25.US one way) from the terminal to Ocho Rios downtown. A \$10 taxi can take you from Ocho Rios bus terminal to the Farm located at the intersection of Breadnut Hill and Orange Hill. You can also land in Kingston but taxis from there are much more expensive (\$120.US one way).

ABOUT THE FARM

Durga's Farm is home to the owners, Lise and Michael Alexander and the employees and volunteers who help us tending to the crops, reforestation and whatever community project we might be working on. We also host local children who make use of our internet café for their homework. We live in a small community and most of your immediate needs can be met within walking distance from the Farm. Cheap (\$1.US per person, one way) and frequent public transportation can take you to town (beach , restaurants, shopping).



The farm itself is located on the top of the hill overlooking the ocean to the North and Fern Gully to the West. It is peaceful, breezy and lush...And we have many types of birds residing or visiting us regularly.

Life on the farm follows the rhythm of weather. Our planting seasons adapt to the conditions (we concentrate on sprouts in the drought season). Regardless of the season, our team is busy each day with farm, kitchen, and administrative work. *Volunteers* can get involved in any of these activities.

Over the year, we have several workshops taking place and volunteers are welcomed to participate and learn from them. However, when there is no specific program going on, you will be assigned to specific duties under the supervision of the farm or kitchen manager. We have an extensive library with many books on the techniques used on the farm and you are welcomed to do your own research and keep yourself busy during your down time. You will also have time off to visit the surroundings and even take weekends off to visit the Island if you wish. We welcome new ideas and feel free to discuss with us projects you would like to experiment with. As long as they follow the orientation of the Farm, we will be glad to assist you.

Everyday, we ask from our volunteer one hour dedicated to cleaning common areas as our philosophy is based on sustaining and taking care of and being responsible for ourselves and the commons. The rest of your time may be divided to other personal activities and interests or self-organized teaching and learning within the community.

On the Farm, effort is put towards conserving natural resources and utilizing renewable energy. Rainwater is collected in a ten-foot deep water-harvesting tank and is used for field irrigation, mostly at the tail end of the summer, a time when water is at its lowest level. Filtered water is provided for drinking and cooking. Also, our food is mostly organic, and comes from our farm, as much as possible, and otherwise from our farmer members throughout the country.

SPECIAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION FEATURES AT DURGA'S DEN.

- Use of solar energy to supply warm water and supplement electricity.
- Water harvesting for irrigation purposes.
- Greywater recycling
- Natural building material as much as possible.
- Use of composting toilets.
- Conservation of biodiversity and practice of mixed-cropping in order to increase food and nutrition output.
- Grass thatched roofing for some of our living quarters.

- We try to utilize sustainable and biodegradable cleaning supplies, soap, toothpaste and deodorant.

LIVING AT Durga's Den

Some of our team members live on the farm and therefore the farm is both their place of work and their home. It is important to respect cultural sensitivities and to understand that you are being welcomed into someone else's home. Therefore you are asked to respect established values and norms.

Durga's Den is a place to learn from nature and sustainable traditions and holistic knowledge systems. The atmosphere and well-being of everyone must be created by each individual and group that comes to stay here.



Volunteers, as well as visiting groups, are expected to contribute each day to the functioning of the farm. This involves fieldwork, kitchen work, gardening, helping with administration, etc. Each guest is asked to contribute daily *Karma Yoga* (concept of the gift of labor for community service) through daily housekeeping chores such as cleaning the bathrooms and dining hall, sweeping, and helping with meal preparation and service, as well as field work. This hour of community service is above your 4 or 6 hours of help in your respective area.

Durga's Den can be a very active place or a very quiet place, depending on the time of year. The atmosphere changes according to the guests, workshops or activities we have.

Usually there are between 2 to 4 *volunteers* living at the farm. This number can increase dramatically if there is a course or school group. It is common for the kitchen to cook for up to 30 people per meal including the farm team.

Volunteers should be prepared for unexpected tasks to arise and be flexible and helpful, assisting the farm staff when needed, especially when there are courses happening or school groups visiting.

Many come to the farm with extra skills to share with the group, such as yoga and massage. It is common for *volunteers* to self organize and give presentations to the group. You can make use of our beautiful yoga platform and we have a massage table available should you need it. If you have any specific skills, feel free to start a course for other volunteers if you want. Please speak with our team about this on your arrival.

Finally, please be aware of cultural differences when it comes to relationships with the opposite sex. In Jamaica, intimate relationships are only expressed in private, even among married couples. The same behaviour is expected of *volunteers*, course participants and visiting groups. If you arrive at the farm as a dating or married couple please discuss with the team in the office in advance whether it is possible to have a shared room. Dormitories or cottages are separated by sex, and to sleep in a dormitory of the opposite gender would not be possible. Couples have the

option of renting one of our cabins that we could reserve at a special rate, according to availability. **We also ask you not to take anyone from the outside.** Anyone coming to the Farm must be registered as a guest.

WORKING ON THE FARM

Work varies according to the season, but often includes planting, weeding, harvesting, seed saving and seed cleaning. *Volunteers* are welcome to focus their time and energy on the tasks that interest them the most. No previous farming experience is necessary, but willingness to learn is a must

Everyone is encouraged to work within his or her personal limits, so if you are unable to perform physical labor or have difficulty working in the sun there will always be other more suitable work for you to do. You will never be required to do work with which you are not comfortable. Because of the intense heat in the summer, we recommend you carry your portable water bottle and drink a lot of water to avoid dehydration.

For international *volunteers*, farm work at Durga's Farm can be an education in squatting. The work often requires patience (such as weeding and seed cleaning), but there is always good humour. Repetitive work is a form of learning, something that has slowly been replaced by technology or outsourcing, and allows us to learn by doing. Artists, dancers and craftsmen learn their trade by repeating their actions until they are ingrained. We reach our full human potential when we use our heads, hearts and hands. The head is not the only source of learning; when we use our hands and hearts we learn at a deeper, more holistic level. At Durga's Den we celebrate the work we do with our hands, and we invite you to be part of this celebration.



DAILY SCHEDULE

Most people rise between 5:30 am and 7:00 am to do their own yoga or meditation practice (optional). Hot herbal tea and seasonal fruits are available at 7:30 am. At 8:00 am a meeting of all volunteers takes place where announcements are made, tasks of the day are presented and questions are addressed. We then move on to the assigned work until 10am for brunch and resume work at 10:30am until 12:30pm, followed by karma yoga until 1:30pm. You are then free to do as you please for the rest of the day. Dinner is served at 6:30pm and the kitchen closes at 7:30pm. Should you missed dinner, we can recommend options closebt. The schedule can be modified at times according to the weather, or tasks to do. Most of the time, you will have the afternoon free.

Quiet hours begin at 10 pm and complete at 6 am. Most people go to bed early, but there are always options to watch a film, read books in the library, or organize other activities away from the sleeping quarters. The gazebo is always opened and offers WIFI from 2pm until 7am. No wifi service during working hours.

During times of courses or workshops, the schedule does change to suit that of the course.

Volunteers will be informed of this before a course begins.

The farm work is carried out 5 days a week and *volunteers* are invited to take Saturday and Sunday off (unless you want to switch one of your weekday to come with assist us at the market in Kingston on Saturday). If you need to leave the farm to run errands or make a visit , please inform the office in advance and sign out of the register. If going anywhere overnight we request you let us know so we are not worried.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE AT THE FARM

Durga's Den has a number of resources that volunteers may find useful including a library, gardens, experimental fields, a seed bank, composting areas etc... You can also have access to the Internet Café (minimum fee).



Durga's Den is open to any project of permaculture or appropriate technology you might want to experiment with. Just talk to us to see if your project could be beneficial for the community and we will see how we can assist.

ROLE OF THE VOLUNTEERS, COURSE PARTICIPANT, OR VISITING GROUPS

Visitors to the Durga's Farm include *volunteers*, course participants, tourists and groups. Every person joining the community is an active contributing member during their stay. All *volunteers* must propose their purpose for coming, and how they will contribute to the farm. All are required to fill out the volunteers application form. We ask that volunteers commit to their time at the farm. Aside from weekend trips, if you would like to travel to different parts of Jamaica please arrange to do so before or after your committed internship or volunteer experience.

Visitors renting accommodation are not expected to work.

Volunteers can come under different program of their choice:

WOOFING program conditions: volunteers commit to 6 hours of work per day in exchange of free accommodation and board. 5 days per week.

Helpx program conditions: volunteers commit to 4 hours of work per day in exchange of free accommodation. A contribution of \$10 US per workday (5 days/week) is requested to cover

utilities and food expenses. .

Internship program: volunteers come for 4 weeks, learn about permaculture and agro ecology as they help in the diverse tasks of the farm. They are expected to work 6 days/week and assist for any special program going on. Accommodation and board are provided for \$450.US for the month.

Volunteers are responsible for getting the correct visa for Jamaica, we recommend a tourist visa as it is the least hassle and is easily accepted. If need be, Durga's Den can supply the necessary invitation letter.

All *volunteers* are expected to adhere to the Community Living Guidelines (see below).

GROUPS

Durga's Den welcomes visiting farmers, schools, colleges, and University groups from all over the world. Some past visitors include Penn State University as well as JOAM farmer training groups to name a few.

If you are interested in bringing a group to Durga's Den, please do contact durgacharron@yahoo.ca for coordination, logistics and costing. Schedules for groups are coordinated according to the needs of the group. Nonetheless, visiting groups are expected to follow the Durga's Den community Living Guidelines (below).

Durga's FARM COMMUNITY LIVING GUIDELINES

Living in our community is different from independent living arrangements because every action and/or lack of action has an effect on the entire community as a whole. In order to ensure that Durga's Den functions at its best, it is imperative that you agree to the following rules and regulations during your stay.

1. I agree to participate in the mission/goals of Durga's Den.

- It is important that all visitors understand that living at Durga's Farm is different from a hotel or hostel environment. While socializing and having fun are welcomed, we also expect that volunteers and visitors are here first and foremost to learn and to contribute to sustainable farming and living.
- I am here to learn more about food democracy and sustainable agriculture, and/or I am here to contribute towards the improvement of this community.
- I am enthusiastic and willing to participate and contribute to the community (i.e.- research, organization, field work, cooking prep, school program planning) or to get involved with projects that are already in motion.
- I am willing to participate in *karma yoga* (1 hour) every day. This can be applied in the field, in the kitchen or cleaning.

2. I agree to keep Durga's Den clean.

- I will follow and respect the cleaning guidelines posted throughout the Farm.
- I will return cups and dishes to the dining room immediately after use (otherwise the kitchen runs out of dishes, and the dirty dishes in your room attract bugs and animals)
- I'll throw out all food wrappers, papers, trash, food wastes in the appropriate bins.

3. I understand that smoking,, or drug use is not permitted under any circumstance on the Farm (as per Jamaican law).

- To respect the sensibilities of the earth community on the farm, the Durga's farm is a smoke and drug free environment.
- Drug use is not tolerated on property. Drinks can be purchased and consumed at the Café.
- Smoke leaves a scent residue on the curtains, on the sheets, on the walls. It's also a fire hazard and imposing on the health of people who do not smoke. If you are a smoker, you are required to restrict your smoking to the designated smoking area

4. I agree to remain respectful to all guests and staff and adhere to quiet hours between 10pm and 6am.

- Please respect this by not playing music or talking loudly during these hours. If you wish to have evening social gatherings, please feel free to use the library or the Café. Please also try to keep music and other noises down during daytime when people are working.

5. Volunteers I understand that attending each and every group meeting is mandatory.

- Be on time.
- Our meetings are a chance for new people to introduce themselves and to meet the others and feel welcomed by the group.
- Our meetings are a chance for all to make any group announcements or to voice any concerns.

- Our group meetings are a chance for you to share what you are currently working on. They are a chance to communicate what you've been learning and what you intend to learn. They are an opportunity to inspire and to be inspired by each other.

6. I agree to eat vegetarian while at Durga's Den

- We choose to prepare only healthy, mostly vegetarian food in order to comply with our food security mission. Vegetarianism has many benefits on an environmental, political and personal health and wellness scale. Eggs and dairies produced on the farm might be used.

7. I agree to inform the office if I plan to leave the site anytime

- I will sign the office register book located in the office with my departure and return date and time. This includes day trips into town.
- If you are going to leave the farm for any reason please contact the office manager during office hours. You should also notify them when you've returned. This is for security reasons.
- If you wish to take personal trips away from the farm during your stay we ask that these be done over the weekend if possible or agreed with the office team with plenty of notice.
- For overnight trips, I will leave a letter detailing where I am going, estimated return and contact information.

8. I agree to take all of my personal belongings before leaving.

- If you wish to leave soaps, cosmetics, clothing, shampoos, shoes etc. please do so in the designated bin on the gazebo. Leaving without donating your items to the team or to a friend will add to the clutter of the space.
- I understand I can leave my luggage in my room for up to two nights. If more than two nights I will leave my luggage in the storage room.

LOGISTICS

RATES FOR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer is a self sustaining experience. The charges for food/utilities is 10US \$ per person per day and is inclusive of breakfast drink/fruits and 2 meals a day. (See special conditions for Woofers and Helpx as described above).

Bathrooms for all accommodation types are common and shared.

Volunteer rooms are available for *volunteers on a twin occupancy basis*. There are only 5 spaces available in the cottages and will be given on a first come first serve basis.

The food at Durga's Den is mostly organic, from our farm, as much as possible or from our farmer friends in different parts of the country.

You can pay for your stay with cash at the beginning of each week. ATM machines are plenty in town so traveling with a debit card is the easiest and safest way to control your money.

PARTICIPATING IN COURSES AT Durga's Den DURING YOUR STAY



If volunteers want to participate to one of our workshop, we offer 50% discount but you will still be expected to work your 4 hours per day around the workshop schedule. You will need to pay ahead of time to reserve your space.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Living standards at Durga's Den are simple and rustic but comfortable. Don't expect a hotel! *Volunteers will share a room with another volunteer of the same sex.* Course participants generally stay in double occupancy, and private rooms are available on special request. All rates vary accordingly. Bedding, pillows and blankets are provided, but towels are not. Living accommodations have a cool cross ventilation and the breeze of the hills will keep you cool at night.

Ecological bathrooms are shared.. Toilet paper is provided,

Bathroom cleaning duties are shared. Outdoor showers are in proximity with the cottages and solar hot water is available most of the time.

Laundry washing service is available for \$5 per kilo of clothing. We can share with you the details of the charges on your arrival.

WHAT TO PACK

Clothing on the farm is casual and comfortable. We suggest you bring on warm long sleeve sweater for the winter months (Nov to March) and light comfortable clothes to cover you from the sun in the summer.



Temperatures are between 72 F to 95F and the hurricane season is between June and November. However, with climate change, we can't tell anymore. We had an extraordinary quiet summer this year, even a drought. Work wise, make sure you bring working gloves for the garden, clog shoes are perfect for gardening, keeping your toes safe. Bring old clothes if you wish to participate in our natural building projects.

Durga's Den provides beds, sheets, pillows, and warm blankets. The following recommended items are not provided but you could easily get them in town..

- Towel
- Flashlight (headlights are very practical)
- Laundry soap: Biodegradable. (Laundry service is available as well)
- Toiletries: Biodegradable and eco friendly products please, if not we can sell you some.
- Reusable water bottle

- Reusable shopping bag (canvas, etc.)
- Pocket-knife
- Laptop if required by you.
- Headphones: For transcribing interviews and listening to music.
- Earplugs: If you are a light sleeper, guard dogs can be loud in the night and the local village might have some “reggae parties” that tend to last late into the night at times..



•Clothing: Clothing for farming. Socks to protect your feet and ankles from mosquitoes at dusk and dawn.. Lightweight flexible clothes, cotton is best. The sun is very strong during the day, light long-sleeved shirts are recommended even in summer months. Also consider bringing a sun hat. During the winter (November to March) it is hot in the day and quite cool at night. Bring a fleece to keep you warm at night.

•Bathing suit/towel: You will definitely need these for the beach and river trips.

•Shoes: Rubber trekking sandals (Keens, Tevas, Merrells, etc.) are ideal for field work and living on the farm. Flip-flops are convenient for bathing, lounging.

•Gardening gloves: If you are used to working with gloves, please bring them with you.

FOOD AND WATER

Meals are mostly vegetarian and consist primarily of seasonally-available organic fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes, grown on the farm as much as possible or from our farmers. Food is served twice a day plus a morning fruit/tea. Should you like to snack during the day, we have some healthy snacks for sale or you could make some provisions at the town supermarket or at the many little shops within walking distance. We have a very strict policy of **“no unauthorized person in the kitchen”**.

Please let us know before your arrival if you have any specific dietary restrictions or food allergies, and we will let you know if we can accommodate your needs.

We provide purified and filtered drinking water on the gazebo. Feel free to fill in your bottle as you need. . . Do not drink from the showers or outside hand basins, it is rain water that has not been purified.

HEALTH

Our major concern is with mosquito borne diseases such as dengue fever. It is seasonal and we would warn you if it is in effect at the time of your visit. No specific vaccination is available against this. We protect ourselves with clothing and mosquito nets around the beds and wear

insect repellent.

Travellers to Jamaica do not usually suffer from bacteria or viral infections from water or food.

CELL PHONE & INTERNET

There is reliable cell phone reception at the farm from the major providers Digicel and Flow. You can also purchase a cell phone for a very low price (aprs \$30. US) with local and international plans without signing any minimum time contract. You can also purchase SIM cards locally, and it is quite cheap to do so. To buy a sim card, you will need to present a formal ID such as your passport or drivers licence.

There is wi-fi at the farm but please note that the quality of reception can vary greatly because of the rural area we are located in.

If you require consistent internet access, you can also think about purchasing a USB portable modem available at low cost in town.

LANGUAGE

English is the most commonly used language at the farm. You will certainly hear some colourful patois, and we also speak Spanish and French if needed.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Durga's Den aims to be a waste-free zone. Upon arrival, you will receive more detailed information about our waste management system. When packing for your trip, please consider the amount of waste your products will create, and how they will be disposed of while you are here. We try to use as little plastic as possible so if you bring it, be prepared to take it back with you when you leave. To reduce our output of plastic, we even produce personal products such as toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant and soaps. You are more than welcomed to purchase what you need from us in our reusable containers. They are all made of natural ingredients and are often better than commercial products. We encourage you to try them, not mentioning that it will be less for you to carry.

ARRIVING IN JAMAICA

Arriving in MONTEGO BAY (MBJ) BY AIR

On the plane, you will be asked to fill in the immigration and customs form. The information regarding the address where you will stay should be:

Durga's Farm, Orange Hill, St-Ann. The reason for your stay should correspond to your visitor's visa(if needed). As a volunteer, you should be considered a vacationer. That is the simplest way to answer the question for the purpose of your trip. If you answer that you come to work or volunteer, the immigration officer will need to see a work permit or a work permit exemption to let you in. If you are asked the names of the persons you will stay with, the owners of Durga's Farm are Michael and Lise Alexander. Our phone number is 869-6154 or 873-8292. They might call us if needed. A return ticket can be requested upon arrival. If you don't have one, you might be obligated to purchase one and the cost might be high. The immigration might ask you for a proof that:

- 1) you can sustain yourself in Jamaica (bank statement, cash etc...)
- 2) a confirmed ticket showing you can leave the country on or before the date of your request.

After you clear customs, you will pass the doors to the arrival lounge where an airport staff member will ask you where you go. If you reserved transportation with us, you must say someone is meeting you outside. They will guide you to the outside area on the right. Go outside and look for someone holding a sign with your name or Durga's Den. If you take a bus from the airport, you can get a JUTA bus transfer to Ocho Rios for approx \$25.US. You can be dropped in Ocho Rios at the Island Village and take a taxi to the farm from there for approx \$10.US. Tell the taxi driver you are going to Colgate, to take the Breadnut Hill road up to Orange Hill (first right turn after the Lions House), where we are the first entrance to the left. There is a sign (Durga's Den) at the corner of Orange Hill and at the entrance of our property. Once again, keep our phone number in case you need us to guide the driver. We are only 10 minutes drive from Ocho Rios.

Arriving in KINGSTON by Air

Same immigration information as per Montego Bay's Arrival.

Transportation from Kingston airport is much more expensive. A taxi will cost you at least \$150.US from the airport to the farm. Another option is to take the shuttle bus from Knutsford Express leaving from New Kingston. But you will still have to take a taxi to get there for at least \$25.US. You can verify the Knutsford Express schedule on their website. The shuttle bus terminal is at the Island Village in Ocho Rios, only 10 minutes drive from the farm ([\\$10.us](#) taxi).

We will gladly organize your airport pick up for you:

Montego Bay: \$ 75. per taxi

Kingston: \$ 125. per taxi

From Ocho Rios by public transportation

Route taxis

Route taxis leave from the central bus stop in Ocho Rios between 9am and 5pm. After hours and on weekend, you must take the taxi in from the the KC Supermarket of the clock tower, ask for a taxi that would go to Colgate. Be careful, a private ride for you alone will cost you \$15 US and it is called a “charter”. They would take you directly to the farm. Otherwise, you have to wait until the taxi is full and then it is only \$1. US. To describe the location of the farm: direction of Colgate by Breadnut Hill, at the corner of Orange Hill. On Orange Hill, it is the first entrance to the left (2 concrete tracks going up).

From Montego Bay or Kingston by BUS

In Montego Bay, take the Knutsford Express from the airport or their Central downtown located at Pier One and LOJ shopping Centre, it will take you straight to Ocho Rios Island Village from where you can catch a taxi to the Farm for \$15.US. These buses are air conditioned, safe and very comfortable, they are also punctual, you can get their schedules and prices online.

Or you can go the roots way, by taking a public minivan from downtown Montego Bay or Kingston to Downtown Ocho Rios bus stop. It is cheap (aprx 7.US) per person and they might charge you more for your baggage. However, be ready to be crammed and have to wait till the bus is full (very full) before it leaves. And they ride fast (very fast).... We do not recommend that option after 5pm.

Our address:

DURGA’S FARM: ORANGE HILL, Parish of St-Ann, Jamaica On the road between Ocho Rios and Kingston, 10 minutes drive from Ocho Rios, just at the end of Fern Gully.

Tel: (876) 869-6154 or (876) 873-8292

Email: durgacharron@yahoo.ca

RECOMMENDED READING

The barefoot architect- A Handbook for green building by Johan van Lengen

Introduction to permaculture design- Bill Mollison

The hand-sculpted house- Ianto Evans, Michael G.Smith, Linda Smiley

These and other books are available for reading in our library.