

Welcome to Avani

Welcome to Avani. This small document will be useful for those of you who are coming to volunteer with Avani as it provides you with the most important information about life in and around our centers. It will help you prepare for your trip, make your way to us and adjust to the local way of life and spirit of Avani.

Upon your arrival at our main center in Tripuradevi, you will be welcomed by those living here, working here, and volunteering here. One person will be provided with the task of guiding you through the center: your guide will show you the layout of the facilities, discuss the schedule of the day, will explain the regulations and functioning of the community, and can answer any questions about the local customs and norms.

If you still have unanswered questions after having read this document, don't hesitate to contact us, by e-mail or by phone.

Visitors

Packing for your trip

Clothing -- For summer (April through October) you will want mainly light and cotton clothes, with a warm sweater for the evenings. During the monsoon season (July-September) you will want rainclothes and/or an umbrella. During the winter, (November through March) you will want to **BRING MANY WARM CLOTHES**. While it is often not freezing, **facilities are not heated**, and it sometimes rains and there will occasionally be snow. 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 - There is no currency exchange facility at Berinag(which is closest bank to Avani) but Mastercard (maestro) works very well in most of the ATM machines including Berinag which is 5km from Avani..

Mosquito repellent -- While Avani is not situated in a malarial region, there are mosquitoes in Avani, especially around the monsoon season. We recommend bringing a familiar brand of mosquito repellent with you when you travel.

Flashlight with batteries -- We recommend bringing a portable flashlight with rechargeable battery.

Getting to Avani in Tripuradevi (from Delhi)

DO NOT GO TO PITHORAGARH OR TANAKPUR AS THIS IS AN UNNECESSARILY LONG WINDING ROUTE TO AVANI. YOUR ROUTE TO REACH AVANI IS HALDWANI/KATHGODAM - ALMORA- BERINAG

Avani is situated in Tripuradevi far up in the Kumaon Himalayas. The nearest train stations are in Kathgodam and Haldwani (both on the same train line). Taxis are available, but the expense is significant. It is also possible to take a bus from Delhi though would not be as comfortable as a train ride. We strongly suggest taking a train to Kathgodam/Haldwani.

Train booking - There are two Indian Railways online booking sites, additionally, Cleartrip.com and MakeMyTrip.com both offer the same and are easy to use. Foreign tourists can also book their tickets

in person under the “foreign tourist quota” from Foreign Tourist Quota offices (available in Delhi at the New Delhi railway station, Mumbai across from Churchgate Station).

Upon Arrival at Haldwani/Kathgodam – You can mention Tripuradevi and Avani to bus and taxi drivers, they will usually know what you mean, if not, there is the big billboard outside Avani.

7-8hr journe travel by road

From either stop you can arrange a taxi to Tripuradevi. Taxis are relatively expensive If you want to take a taxi, it is best to talk to someone at AVANI, so that you can travel by a known taxi service.

The other option is to take an ordinary bus or a shared jeep from Haldwani..They are vastly cheaper than taxis from Haldwani to Tripuradevi.

At Avani

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 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.

We hope that every volunteer that spends time in Avani tries to be as much as possible in harmony with the Indian culture and philosophy. We will give you some guidelines, which will help you to develop good relations with the local people and a respect for their moral standards.

Dress code

We expect our volunteers to be dressed modestly and in an Indian style, as well as to appear clean and neat.

Males – Avoid going bare-chested. Men can wear t-shirt, shirts, or a kurta; as well as trousers.

Females – You should wear a Salwar Kameez, a common and pretty dress and is available almost everywhere in India. You should not wear tight-fitting clothing, short skirts, and dresses with exposed midriffs, etc.

How to behave at Avani

Alcohol, drugs are strictly forbidden at Avani. Tobacco is highly discouraged here. If you still have to smoke, do so discretely and away from public attention.

A non-violent approach, verbal and physical, towards children and other people is absolutely necessary. Always feel free to share your doubts and problems with the people in charge.

Respect: Inside Avani

Respect is essential for all the people who live and work in the center (workers, employees, volunteers, visitors, persons in charge).

Avani is a public place, open for everybody. Respect for our visitors and the way we receive them is important for the relations of the project. For the same reasons it is also important to keep the premises of the center, including the rooms and workshops, clean.

If you would like to give small gifts to the people in Avani, it should certainly not be money, small inexpensive trinkets from your country would be fine. This is necessary to keep human relations outside of any monetary expectations. Love is the most beautiful gift that you can give them, and you will get lots of it in return.

Respect: Outside Avani

Outsiders (westerners) who pass through the surrounding villages are usually automatically associated with Avani. This is why we request that the rules that apply inside our centers (dress, substance use, etc.) are also applicable outside our centers. We must be careful about the way we behave in Berinag or in the villages we visit.

Languages – The most spoken languages are the local language Kumaoni (or Pahari) and Hindi. The use of English is limited and mostly spoken by staff. However everybody is willing to learn and will be happy to speak in their basic English to you!

Life at Avani

Being involved – We welcome volunteers with specific areas of expertise or interest that can enrich the work we do at Avani. Please work with us to discuss specific projects you might undertake during your time with us. Additionally, many volunteers find it worthwhile to join in the daily outdoor work for one hour at the center (known as “Shramdan”), or in food prep work in our community kitchen.

Accommodation – Volunteers are accommodated on Avani’s premises, choosing from a proper guest room dormitory option depending on what is available. In the dormitory four people share a room. Generally the different sexes are separated; however, couples are able to stay together in a guest room and their privacy is respected. Not only volunteers, but also trainees, workers and staff and their respective families live at the center. We live like a big family and there is very little personal space. You need to like living in a community.

Accommodation costs include lodging and three meals a day. You will need to make a cash donation to Avani to cover the costs of accommodation. Please confirm current rates with staff at Avani.

Office – We have shared office space, hence you need to avoid loud music and keep your space clean. It is advisable you carry your own laptop since the office computers maybe busy.

Catering – Meals are served three times a day. The food is normally seasonal, vegetarian and of course Indian. At the end of every meal, we wash our plates ourselves.

Water usage – Water is very scarce on the Avani premises. We capture and recycle as much water as possible, with some amount of our potable water being trucked in from afar. We urge you to conserve as much water as possible.

Drinking water – Filtered drinking water is available from taps inside and outside the kitchen. In the winters it is advised to drink hot water (“garam pani”) to avoid falling sick.

Toilets – Toilet paper is not common in India. We use the Indian method of washing with water in a small jug or with jets provided. In case after washing you need to dry yourself with toilet paper, do not dispose it in the pots, use the bin for biodegradable wastes, which will be sent to compost pit. One of the people in charge will be able to explain this to you if necessary.

Menstrual pads or tampons would need to be tied in secure plastic bags and brought to the non biodegradable garbage to be disposed off.

Laundry and shower – Laundry is being done by hand. However on sunny days guests are allowed to use the washing machine. Warm water is available thanks to solar water heaters.

Waste – 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. There are two separate bins for biodegradable and non-biodegradable wastes. The former is sent to compost pit and for the latter you need to tie the waste in secure plastic bags before disposal to a designated area. Needless to say that everyone should manage their own wastes.

Hygiene – Personal hygiene maintained by each and every person is extremely important. Treat your small wounds and infections as soon as they appear. We maintain this hygiene with extra vigilance in the kitchen!

Communications

Internet – The availability of internet in this area is scarce. There is internet connectivity available during working hours in the office at Avani itself, with a computer available for browsing or email use, and WiFi access in the office building. Note that Avani-related work is given priority over personal internet usage. It is useful to bring a USB-stick (flash drive).

Telephone – It is easy to make international phone calls from all the major villages and towns around. Phone stands, usually proclaiming “STD / ISD / PCO” are everywhere and you pay after the call. It may also be possible to acquire a cell phone during your stay in India – ask someone from Avani. Volunteers can also receive calls at the office in case of emergency, but the use of Avani phones is primarily reserved for administrative tasks.

Important locations for the Avani volunteer

Tripuradevi

Tripuradevi is a small village offering limited postal services, small snacks, vegetables, chai, basic services: copy, fax, SIM cards, recharge cards, phone calls.

Raiagar

Raiagar is a small village at an important roadway junction. Larger than Tripuradevi but smaller than Berinag, Raiagar offers more services and goods and at a 20 minute walk is the closest stop for things you might not be able to find in Tripuradevi.

Berinag

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

Almora

Almora 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.