

Maison de la Gare



*Parce que les Talibés d'aujourd'hui sont
les Hommes de demain*

Volunteer Handbook

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Introduction: Background to Maison de la Gare and our Work

Senegal, like other West African countries, has a tradition of enrolling children, mainly boys between the ages of 4 and 15, into Quranic schools called Daaras. These boys are often sent by their families to study with Marabouts, religious scholars who may house the children at the schools. These children are known as talibés. The word comes from the Arabic 'talib' meaning student or disciple

The talibés often come from remote rural areas where education is seldom provided. In many cases the children come from surrounding countries and are brought to Senegal by the Marabouts under conditions equivalent to 'child trafficking'.

The problem affecting the talibés originates in the fact that a majority of Daaras only provide Quranic education. The classes are

limited to a few hours of training each day, and the rest of the time the boys are sent out to beg on the streets for food and money. This results in many of the children living at the Daaras for periods of many years, and never enrolling in the national education system where they could learn how to read and write in French, the national language.

Due to the lack of adequate housing, care and sanitary conditions, many of the talibé children suffer from diseases which are often easy to prevent. In addition, many boys and organizations working with them report physical abuse and extreme neglect. Although there are many local and national initiatives having the objective of ending these practices which deprive the talibé boys of the fundamental human rights, much work remains.

Maisons de la Gare (MDG) is a local non-profit association based in the northern city of Saint Louis, founded in 2007. MDG's objective is to protect the rights of the talibé children by improving their living conditions and level of education while provide much needed primary aid, in and around the community of Saint Louis. MDG enjoys strong relationships with many Marabouts in the Saint Louis region, the basis for long-term solutions and for being in a position to respond to the most urgent needs.

Volunteering with the MDG program provides an opportunity to make a difference, while discovering the western-most corner of the African continent.

**Join MDG and the
volunteer network on**

facebook

If you have questions, want to get involved, are thinking of working with MDG, want to know more about the array of issues surrounding talibés children in the community of Saint Louis, or just want to share memories with old friend and make new friends, please join the [MDG network on facebook](#).



VOLUNTEER WITH MAISON DE LA GARE

As a volunteer with MDG, you will have the possibility of taking part in a wide range of activities while focusing your efforts in one specific area- protection of Children Rights. Your experience with MDG may be your first involvement with one of the many aspects of development. While previous experience from volunteering and community work is highly valued, we warmly welcome 'new' volunteers to join MDG team at our centre in Saint Louis.

Although MDG is a young organization, it has accumulated considerable experience working with volunteers. The staff and founding members all have previous experience in handling the issues of daily life, and responding to all of the questions that a new member of the Saint Louis community might have, and dealing with issues which you as new member of the community of St. Louis may encounter.

As a volunteer, you will also have access to MDG's international network. This includes local organizations, international development agencies, consultancies and NGOs, and also former and current volunteers all over the world. Many former MDG volunteers have stayed in regular contact with us, and some have also been inspired to start projects of their own.

WHY A VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK?

MDG is far from being the only development oriented organization in the region, or the only association which offers volunteering opportunities. Saint Louis hosts an array of local and non-governmental organizations but also international development and cooperation agencies as well as international volunteer placement organizations. These all work in different areas yet with similar goals

Applying for a volunteer program can be overwhelming and at times a challenge in itself. Just remember that where you experience takes you is a combination of your reasons for volunteering, your commitment, time spent as a volunteer, expectations, and of course previous experience and understanding of issues related to development and children's rights.

Your familiarity with a new environment, the language, its customs, and your sensitivity to cultural and personal differences will also impact your experience as a volunteer. An experienced volunteer may be more flexible facing new challenges and situations, but also more critical and have higher expectation of the programme. For 'new' volunteers, the experience may be overwhelming but perhaps also the first step towards a new way of seeing the world we live in

This is why it is important that you ask yourself a number of questions before you embark on a potentially life changing experience as a volunteer. This handbook is designed as a guide for both experienced and first time volunteers. It is designed to give you some insight into the many aspects of volunteering with MDG. And it aims, above all, at improving your experience as a volunteer and encouraging you to join our efforts in Saint Louis, Senegal.

WHO CAN REGISTER, AND HOW?

MDG welcomes applications from everybody who is interested in our programs and wants to contribute to the community of Saint Louis. All applicants must be at least 18 years of age at the time of submitting their application. We give preference to candidates who are enrolled at university and have previous experience relevant to our work. For more information about each program, and specific competences required, please see the section titled 'Volunteer Programs'. Applicants should also have the ability to work independently as well as in a group, in order to contribute effectively to our efforts in and around the community of Saint Louis.

The official language in Senegal is French. Wolof, which is spoken by about 80 percent of the population, is our second working language. While we do not expect volunteers to have knowledge of Wolof, we do give priority to those having a working knowledge in French. Being able to communicate with our staff and the community is important to make your experience count.

It is equally important that you be in good physical condition, and not have medical issues that will prevent you from working under often difficult conditions. Remember that our priority is the work with the children. While volunteers are very important for us, we can only assume a limited responsibility for them and can not respond to special needs. MDG can offer you an experience that can change your life, but we are not an all-inclusive travel agency.

Remember also that Senegal is a Muslim country. Even though alcohol and tobacco are easily available, we ask that you be very circumspect in your consumption. We have a zero-tolerance policy concerning illicit drugs, in accordance with Senegalese law. For more information on the conditions of life and work in Senegal, please see the section "Life and Work in Saint Louis".

Applications are accepted throughout the year. Our registration form can be downloaded directly from our webpage and must be accompanied by a personal letter of motivation and your CV. You must identify two references who are familiar with your merits and personal history, but are not members of your direct or extended family. Once we have studied your documents and have accepted you as a volunteer, you must sign the Volunteer Waiver which can also be downloaded directly from our website. Please be sure to study this Handbook and understand the conditions of your placement before signing the Waiver.

We encourage you to submit all documents related to your application by e-mail.

We also encourage all candidates to contact former volunteers and our partners and affiliated organization before and during the application process. Contact information is available on our website at www.mdgsl.com.

HOW TO REGISTER AS AN MDG VOLUNTEER?

- Download this Volunteer Handbook.
- Reflect on the reasons why you want to be a volunteer, personal and professional ...
- How can you contribute in a positive way?
- Quel est votre but et comment vous percevez votre implication dans la communauté?
- Contact MDG, former volunteers and partner organisations to learn more about their experiences.
- Become familiar with questions related to the rights of children: international declarations and conventions, recommendations for humanitarian work and, especially, the ethical aspects of work with children.
- Complete the registration form.
- Write a letter of motivation.
- Sign the Volunteer Waiver, after ensuring that you understand it fully.
- Coordinate your arrival with MDG and the person responsible to meet you. Be sure that you know in advance exactly what your living arrangements will be, with a host family or in a small hotel.



SOME REFERENCES ON RESPONSIBLE VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Assessing the organization you want to volunteer with as well as your impact is extremely important in order to make the most of your experience in the field. The following organizations have long standing and documented experience which can be of help:

- [Voluntourism 101](#)
- [Peace Corps](#)
- [United Nations Volunteers \(UNV\)](#)
- [Building Bridges Coalition \(BBC\)](#)
- [Idealist.org](#)
- [Protect the Earth Protect Yourself \(PEPY\)](#)



HOW LONG DOES A VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT LAST?

Volunteering with MDG is a highly personal experience. We do not impose time limits. However, the impact and quality of short-term volunteering can be quite different than for a longer-term commitment. If you are hoping to 'change the world', it is not realistic to expect to do this in two weeks. Please also keep in mind that development work can be very complicated, and that you can experience frustrations that can affect achieving your objectives.

Studies show that volunteers who are least happy with their experience are those who have unrealistic expectations for their work and the impact that they will have on the ground. Such a sense of dissatisfaction is not only the 'fault' or 'incompetence' of the organization that you are working with. It is more likely to

relate to your expectations concerning the program and what you can achieve in a limited time. Please consider the following points:

- What is your role as a volunteer, and what do you expect to achieve?
- What are your goals and objective, and how to these correspond to MDG's programs?
- What are your particular skills and qualities?
- How do you envisage contributing to MDG and the community of Saint Louis?
- How much time are you ready to commit as a volunteer with MDG, and how will this impact your personal goals, aspirations and achievements?



WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT MDG

MDG's work is driven by the needs of the local community. This implies that our efforts and commitment extend beyond our direct involvement with the talibé children as we work with local partners. We are continuously building relationships with Marabouts, schools, families, local businesses, local government and other organizations in order to take a broad approach to the vast array of issues that face the children in their daily lives. As a civil society organization, we are well equipped to identify and respond to both the long-term challenge and more immediate urgent needs.

The MDG volunteer program is entirely run and administered from Saint Louis. This also means that the recruitment is conducted locally by our local staff, in co-operation with our international partners.

Note that our international partners are not volunteer sending organizations but rather development agencies, charities, and former volunteers who have shown long term commitment to advocating on behalf of MDG and our work.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

The MDG Volunteer Programme is designed as a social entrepreneurial initiative which takes into account not only the benefits of 'volunteering' and international commitment but fosters local economic development and most importantly local ownership of development strategies.

By cutting out all intermediaries, the volunteer program is able to fund a portion of the MDG activities and so minimize the organization's dependency on 'traditional aid'. This also allows us to enjoy certain autonomy to develop and implement local strategies. The volunteer program enables MDG to hire local staff and use local resources which range from engaging host families to local production.

The MDG volunteer initiative was developed with the technical assistance of several international partners which promote and advocate the program on our behalf. Our approach is rather unique as the program is our source for covering administrative costs as well as funding much of our activities for the talibé children.

Program fees include transportation to and from Dakar, placement in a host family or a small hotel, and placement in the volunteer role of your choice with MDG. We do not make international travel arrangements for our volunteers. Also, every volunteer is responsible to obtain appropriate travel and medical insurance as well as a passport, necessary vaccinations and, if required, a visa.

All activities of a personal nature are at the volunteer's personal expense. For information on the program cost, please consult the 'Volunteer Program Fees' on our website. There are no supplemental costs for program-related activities.

TRAVEL CHECKLIST

- Our Volunteer Handbook, and a travel guide for the region
- Visa if required, or if you plan to stay more than three months
- A copy or a scan of all of your important documents
- Vaccines (check with your local vaccination centre or travel clinic)
- Medications
- Travel towel
- Sleeping bag
- Sun block
- Impregnated mosquito net
- Mosquito repellent
- Pocket flashlight
- Appropriate clothing, depending on the season
- Comfortable footwear
- Electrical adapter, if required (voltage in Senegal is 230 V A.C. at 60 cycles)
- Personal computer (not essential, but you will find this very useful)

Please do not bring anything with you that can be acquired or is produced locally, especially in relation to MDG's programs. An important part of being a responsible volunteer is to maximize the benefit of your time in the field, being aware of your 'footprint' on the local community.



LIFE IN SAINT LOUIS AND SENEGAL

Being part of the Saint Louis community is a tremendously fascinating experience. It opens doors for new encounters, not only with people but also with the mysticism and traditions of Islamic belief. Besides being the former administrative centre of Senegal, the city is also the destination of a yearly pilgrimage for many Muslims. On September 5th the city becomes flooded with pilgrims from across Senegal and abroad commemorating the last two prayers of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the most important religious figure in Senegalese history, before his deportation to Gabon by the French colonial administration.

As the former capital of Senegal, Saint Louis offers a mix of traditional West African life and colonial heritage which is expressed through its architecture and city life - a true fusion of a Caribbean feel and Senegalese 'teranga' (hospitality). Nowhere can 'Sengal' or 'Sunugal' - meaning our boat ("notre pirogue") in Wolof - be more adequately used to express the feel of life than in the city of Saint Louis.

The official language in Senegal is French. However, the country has a vast array of native languages and several among them are considered 'national languages'. Wolof is our second working language and is spoken by about 80 percent of the population. While we do not expect volunteers to have knowledge of Wolof, we do give priority to applicants who have

working knowledge in French. Being able to communicate with our staff and the community is of utmost importance if you want to make your experience count.

Living conditions in Saint Louis are at times more Spartan than what you may be used to. This does not mean that you should fear isolation from the rest of the world. There are public spaces providing Wi-Fi networks for free and telecommunications are reasonably reliable.

It is advisable to purchase a local SIM card for your cell phone, which will allow you to have a local number. SIM cards are available in many stores as well as at the airport in Dakar. Charging your phone with credits is easily done by purchasing a card for the equivalent amount. Just follow the instructions on the card.

Please make sure that your phone will be able to operate in the region and cope with the climate. Be aware that tropical heat and humidity can cause malfunctions in many electrical appliances.

Senegal has a tropical climate with a short rainy season ranging between the months of July and September (occasionally spilling over into November). The rest of the year is hot and humid.

SOME IDEA OF PRICES

100 CFA = 0.15€ - 100 CFA = 0.20\$US

- Sandals: 1,500 CFA
- Taxi: 500 to 650 CFA
- Cloth fabric: 1,000 CFA per meter
- Touba coffee: 50 CFA
- Baguette: 150 CFA
- Bottled water: 500 CFA
- 1 kg bananas: 700 CFA
- 1 kg apples: 1,400 CFA
- 1 kg oranges: 1,400 CFA
- 1 litre of milk: 1,200 CFA
- SIM card (cell phone) : 1,000 CFA
- Djembé: 25,000 to 30,000 CFA
- Artisan necklace: 2,500 CFA
- Artisan bracelet: 1,000 to 1,500 CFA
- Painting: 1,500 to 5,000 CFA



The rainy season brings with it increased risk of contracting malaria. As in all seasons of the year, it is highly recommended that you take necessary precautions by taking malaria pills, using a mosquito repellent frequently, wearing suitable clothing and making use of a good mosquito net. Consult with your local vaccination clinic prior to your departure.

Special attention to other health concerns is necessary in the rainy season. Lack of adequate drainage results in areas of both the island of Saint Louis and the surrounding suburbs becoming flooded. Accumulation of stagnant water provides a breeding ground for mosquitos carrying malaria and other parasites. Many daaras are flooded during the rains, and access to schools is restricted. Care must be taken not to walk in stagnant water, especially if you have small wounds, as this can increase the risk of contracting parasites and infections.

Please make sure that you have all of the necessary vaccinations prior to your departure. There is a major hospital in Saint Louis where you can receive satisfactory treatment in an emergency. However, keep in mind that it may not be what you are used to at home. Make sure to have appropriate insurance and a copy of all your documents with you.

During the year, temperatures may range from 18 to 45 C° with generally high humidity. Nights can be chilly during the months of November to January, while the days are usually pleasantly warm. Air conditioning is not readily available, and most establishments such as bars and restaurants rely on fans. Although this is changing slowly, don't expect many places to supply a refreshing artificial breeze.

The humidity can be debilitating, and working under the sun exposes you to the risk of severe dehydration. You need to hydrate regularly and should always have a supply of bottled water with you - available at most local stores. We recommend that you bring hydrating tablets; please consult your local pharmacy.

Be aware of the signs of dehydration, which unfortunately are similar to malaria symptoms: headache, fever, nausea and chills. Please don't panic - drink fluids. If you fear that you may have contracted malaria, see a doctor. It can only be properly diagnosed through blood tests

Saint Louis has a rather good and surprisingly clean supply of water due to its geographic location, and locals drink water from the tap. However, it is not recommended that you try this experience.

You should be ready for a few days of travel sickness, due to the different climate and new environment. Be prepared with adequate medication. Professional medical attention is necessary if you don't get better within a few days.

Occasional interruptions of water and electricity supply are not uncommon. Although they rarely last for too long, they can still be an inconvenience and rather demanding if you are in Senegal during the hottest months.

Lastly, a few words about local cuisine. Understandably it is different from what you eat at home. Western style food is available in the large cities, but be prepared to find mostly local dishes in and around Saint Louis. There are several local stores, markets and restaurants so you do not need to worry about being able to find something to eat. However, don't expect to eat like at home!

Be respectful of local culinary customs and home cooked meals. The diet in Senegal consists of rice, couscous, vegetables, fish or meat, and bread. 'Yassa' or 'Thebou Diene' are two common meals which are delicious and shared by all from a large plate. Senegal is a Muslim country, and pork is rarely (if ever) served. While enjoying a meal, never eat with your left hand - it is considered rude.

Keep in mind that the above is not exhaustive. In addition to this Handbook, we recommend further research on the internet and use of recognized travel guides about the region.



WORKING WITH CHILDREN, AND IN PARTICULAR THE TALIBÉS

Working with children who are separated temporarily or permanently from their families and living under in extreme conditions is a delicate matter. This chapter highlights some important points to consider in your work with talibé children.

We strongly suggest that you familiarize yourself with the U.N. 'Declaration on the Rights of the Child', the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child', the Human Rights Watch report 'Off the Backs of the Children' and other relevant international documents related to the protection of children rights.

Many of the children served by Maison de la Gare have suffered extreme neglect in terms of nutrition and healthcare, systematic violence, and prolonged separation from their families and homes. This however does not guarantee that your best intentions are always ethical or that they assure respect for the best interests of the children

Please keep in mind that you are subject to national legislation. NGOs and civil society organizations are under constant scrutiny from authorities and the religious community. Your actions may directly impede our trust and working relations with the community and especially with religious leaders. Be sure to preserve your dignity and our reputation intact.

Please remember also that we have spent years building working relations in and around the community of Saint Louis. Our work and the protection of the children are dependent on preserving these positive relationships. Always control your personal feelings when working in the field. Be diplomatic and observe a high level

of professionalism at all times. Any discussions should be taken up in private with MDG's staff and not when working with the children or the community.

When working directly with the children, please show exemplary behaviour. Always model positive behaviours rather than aggression.

Begging is against the law in Senegal. Although the application of the law has only enjoyed limited success, you should not foster such behaviour or encourage it in any way, although your heart may be breaking. Promote rewards for positive behaviour. Always promote health - this includes not smoking in front of the children or using alcohol even when you think that you are not being seen. We have a zero-tolerance policy on drugs. We don't recommend giving away candy or any substances that can potentially worsen the condition of the children; know that malnourished children can get very ill if they eat chocolate.

Be especially careful when administering medication. Always consult our team. Many of the children suffer chronically from undocumented illnesses, frequently caused by lack of adequate hygiene. Always exhibit model behaviour in this respect. They will observe and learn from you if you do something that they are not used to - washing your hands before a meal, throwing garbage in a bin, etc...

It is always unacceptable to show any reluctance or distaste in your interactions with the children.

You are more than welcome to document your time with MDG, but please be aware that permission must be asked from either parents or de facto guardians for working with any particular child and in particular when taking pictures. If someone shows discontent or disagreement with you photographing them, stop! Always be mindful of how you depict the child and where you use the images. Document, but don't incite pity.

Social networks, picture sharing sites and the internet in general are the fastest way to diffuse information, but this also makes you ultimately responsible for your actions. Make sure that your images cannot be misused or manipulated to incite paedophilia. It is under no circumstances acceptable to take pictures depicting nudity or any genital areas.

Depicting children in distress may seem to be a good way of showing the 'reality' of the talibés. However, please make sure that the child's identity is protected and that there is no risk of reprisals against the child.

Please remember that taking pictures or any action that may be disruptive during class sessions is highly restricted. Quality of teaching is important, as is the respect shown towards the teacher. Remember that your function is to facilitate our work. Discussions should be taken up within MDG meetings and never during the course of our activities. If you have any observations or complaints, please present these directly to us. And always ask our staff before taking any initiative. Your best intentions may affect our work adversely in the long run.



VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

The MDG volunteer program offers working opportunities on different themes, all of which respond to international conventions of the Rights of the Child. Every position offers on-the-ground experience. Please take the time to choose the area where you would like to concentrate your efforts.

Education

French is the official language of Senegal, and all children in the state school education are taught French from an early age. However, the majority of talibé children are not given this opportunity as the education they receive in the Daraas is limited to Quranic studies. This lack of adequate preparation limits the children's ability to speak, read and write in French, leaving them with inadequate language skills even into their teenage years. Moreover, many talibés come from distant regions and countries, with the result that they speak quite different languages.

At MDG, talibé students are introduced to the elements of the Senegalese primary cycle: French, mathematics, civic instruction and recitation/singing. As a volunteer, you will work under the supervision of a local teacher. It is important to remember that, while the scholastic development of these children has been extremely restricted, they have the ability and "savoir faire" to respond well to creative and original teaching.

Keep in mind that continuity and quality of education go hand-in-hand. Volunteers are here to support the learning process, so bring originality and new ideas to the daily routine to make education more accessible for these children.

Sports

Sports are a huge part of Senegalese culture and an important element of daily life. Soccer (football) and wrestling are the most popular national sports, and they attract an enormous following. MDG organizes regular soccer matches and local championships for talibé children of all ages, in sports fields that are available around the city.

MDG's sports program is concerned not only with providing the talibé children with a healthful outlet for physical activity, but also with giving these children a rare opportunity to play and enjoy themselves as children. Volunteers interested in working in this program should have previous experience working with children in sports education. For health and safety reasons, candidates should be in good physical condition. They should also have excellent people and organizational skills.

Art, Music and Excursions

Visual arts and music are invaluable vehicles for communication and self-expression. For the talibé children, they are activities that can influence directly their growth and psychological development. Volunteers who wish to take part in this program must be passionate about working with children and have previous knowledge of child development issues. They should also have a solid base in teaching art and/or music.

This program also includes as an important element the organization of excursions. Such activities allow the children to discover new experiences and horizons. Volunteers having experience with organizing and monitoring groups of children will be much appreciated by the heavily committed MDG staff members



Health Care and Hygiene

As an association working to protect and improve the quality of life of the talibé children, MDG dedicates substantial resources to their needs for improved hygiene and medical care.

Working as a volunteer in this area requires dynamism, willingness and sensitivity. You will be expected to be in continuous contact with talibé children both in the MDG centre and in the Daaras where the children live. Responsibilities will include identifying and treating wounds and other health problems, seeking appropriate medical support when possible and appropriate and teaching basic personal hygiene, all with the objective of helping the children to sustain a reasonable condition of health.

Gardening and Site Development

MDG's centre is not only a space for study and learning; it is a refuge for the talibé children. It is a place where they must feel at home, and our objective is that they find everything there necessary to foster their growth and development.

To work as a volunteer in this area, you should have the mechanical skills necessary for maintenance, construction and repairs. Also, some knowledge of gardening is very desirable, as MDG's garden within the centre is playing a major role in our struggle to eliminate begging and to provide the talibé children with skills for their future.

Experience working effectively with children would be a strong asset.

REQUIREMENTS – EDUCATION

- Excellent written and oral skills in French
- A passion and an aptitude for working with children
- Experience with teaching or tutoring would be a strong positive

Recommendations

Innovation and creativity are welcomed as long as they do not interfere with regular educational activities. If there are any problems to report, please do so directly and discreetly with one of the Senegalese teachers or a member of the MDG staff.

REQUIREMENTS – GARDENING AND SITE DEVELOPMENT

- Skills in renovation work, painting and repairs
- A sincere interest in gardening, and related knowledge and experience
- Ability to work well with children, in a supportive and respectful way
- A good decorating sense would be a strong positive

Recommendations

Participation in development work in MDG's centre will be a vehicle for you to become acquainted with the talibé children. It is critical that you be as receptive as possible to suggestions and support from the children, as it is really for them that you are working.

REQUIREMENTS – ART, MUSIC AND EXCURSIONS

- Previous experience working with children
- Good mastery of methods and tools for communicating through expressive media such as drawing and music
- Strong skills in communicating with children, and good interpersonal and organizational abilities
- Experience organizing and monitoring groups of children

Experience and knowledge of child development issues is a strong positive

Recommendations

Remember that educational success is very dependent on continuity. Your involvement in creative workshops will inevitably result in strong feelings and attachments. Although creativity is encouraged, please be aware that, once you leave, your approach may leave with you. Always use materials and resources that are at hand and available in the immediate environment.

REQUIREMENTS – HEALTH CARE AND HYGIENE

- Be willing and eager to patiently and appropriately help children suffering medical distress
- Have basic first-aid training
- Be capable of taking charge in an emergency of a child suffering from a wound or sickness of any type.

Recommendations

When dealing with children in a situation of vulnerability, you must always be aware of the potential impact that your reactions can have on them. You will have to call on your humanitarian values to meet the challenges, as the situations that you encounter will often be distressing and complex.

REQUIREMENTS – SPORTS

- Experience with sports education
- Experience working with children involved in physical activities
- Knowledge of the safety requirements of organized sports, and an ability to take the precautions necessary to minimize risk of injuries.
- Excellent interpersonal and organizational skills
- Good physical condition

Recommendations

Sports are a recreational activity as well as a way to foster team work and an improved sense of self. Although there are competitive aspects to all sports, you should take care to encourage cohesion between the boys. Remember that there are many aspects of their lives which you may never come in contact with. Minimize the risk of encouraging hurtful behavior amongst the children.



ARRIVING IN SENEGAL AND SAINT LOUIS

This final chapter of the Handbook will prepare you for your arrival and perhaps your first encounter with Senegal. Even if this is not your first visit, it is still important that you take note of our procedures and of the arrangements for your first encounter with MDG personnel.

While approaching Dakar by plane, you will be asked to fill out a form with your personal, travel and contact details. Please use the address of the MDG centre in Saint Louis as indicated on our website.

Most volunteers are in Senegal on a tourist visa. Visa requirements vary depending on your home country. You can obtain your visa either before you leave (preferable, to facilitate airport formalities) or on arriving at the airport in Senegal.

Most flights are to and from Dakar's Léopold Sédar Senghor International Airport. Flights often arrive late at night, which means that you will most likely not be able to reach Saint Louis the same day. The MDG volunteer programme has taken this fact into consideration and that is why we include a 'pickup fee' in the volunteer program fee. We are unfortunately not able to waive this fee if your travel arrangements do not require a layover in Dakar.

The airport experience can be overwhelming, especially upon exiting the airport terminal area. Non-passengers are normally not allowed into the arrival area, and that is why you will have to exit the airport terminal before meeting our personnel. Please make sure that you have informed MDG about your arrival details prior to

your departure from home.

Cash machines are available at the airport, and it is recommendable that you make a withdrawal (most cards are accepted, although 'American Express' is less common) or make an exchange into the national currency (CFA francs). Always have some foreign currency with you, US dollars or Euros, in case of emergencies.

The first night is normally spent at a nearby hotel in Dakar. Your stay and travel from and to Dakar as well as breakfast are covered by the program fee. The next morning you will be travelling to Saint Louis. MDG does not have its own vehicles, so you will be travelling by a taxi service which we will arrange to meet you.

The trip to Saint Louis normally takes 3-5 hours depending on traffic in Dakar. Occasional car breakdowns may delay your arrival in Saint Louis, but you will not be stranded as there will always be someone with you from the MDG team.

Upon arrival you will be shown to your chosen housing, whether with a host family or independent living, and introduced and made familiar with MDG working procedures and our centre. You will have a chance to catch your breath and relax before you are fully oriented and start working with us and the children.

FINAL WORDS OF WELCOME

Senegal is far from being a hostile place. Living conditions are different from what you might be used to, but we will do everything that we can so that you will feel at home. This is Senegalese “teranga”. Our volunteer program is organized so that you will meet new people, make new friends, and learn and grow thanks to new experiences while at the same time making an important difference.

The pages above may be intimidating for you but, if you have made it to here, we know that we will be greeting you soon at Maison de la Gare!

Eksil akh diam! – Welcome!

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This Volunteer Handbook was written and produced for Maison de la Gare by Fallckolm Cuenca and Nolwenn Gueguen of Sustainable Development Group International (SDGI) / SDGI Consulting - Sweden. MDG's Volunteer Handbook is based on work and experience accumulated by, among others: Building Bridges Coalition (BBC), Comhláms Volunteer Charter, Voluntourism 101 'Operator Self Check Guide', PEPY Ride. We also thank all of the organizations and volunteers who are committed to promoting responsible volunteering.

For other information or questions of any kind about volunteering with Maison de la Gare, please write to us at info@mdgsl.com. For other information or questions about responsible volunteering, or about how to improve this Handbook, contact SDGI at info@sdg-int.org.

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