



**VILLAGE
EXCHANGE
INTERNATIONAL/GHANA**

Volunteer Orientation Packet

The Volunteer Orientation Packet is meant to provide information for volunteers to prepare for their arrival in Ho and working with Village Exchange Ghana (VEG). It is also encouraged for volunteers to seek out additional information about Ghana on their own to supplement the information provided here.

Volunteering with Village Exchange Ghana

VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION PACKET

WELCOME TO VILLAGE EXCHANGE GHANA! We are excited to begin working together. Your time is very valuable, and we thank you for using it to help support our organization. In this orientation packet, you will find information that will help you on every step of the way from pre-arrival to working and living in Ho. You will find an overview of the organization and its programs, as well as, cultural and practical information about living in Ho.

At VEG, we take your skills, expertise and experiences seriously and want to thank you for your contribution to our programs. We invite you to take initiative and have open conversations with our staff. We believe that we all have a lot to learn from one another and value the exchange of knowledge.

1. About Village Exchange Ghana

Vision

Promote women empowerment, renewable energy, and entrepreneurship with a vision to enable women and disadvantaged youth to take their destiny in their own hands and to make affordable green energy available to everyone.

Mission

Promote the economic empowerment of vulnerable rural youth, mainly women, in the Volta Region of Ghana through a **holistic approach of evidence-based programmes** in:

- **Reproductive, sexual and maternal health (RSMH)** and
- Promotion of **social entrepreneurship**, including **vocational training**

Those vulnerable rural youth will thus become responsible citizens, able to move out of poverty, regain dignity, care about their health and become powerful agents of their own, their families' and their communities change.

Programs

VEG has two major programs:

The Lady Volta Green Tech Academy, which provides training in electricity, renewable energies and information and communication technologies, as well as SRMH education.

VEG believes that educating women while helping them acquire professional skills and encouraging good and responsible reproductive and sexual health is an important way of promoting the empowerment of women, improving gender relations and ensuring that women have equal professional opportunities. Our programs

also aim at providing support and realistic solutions for young mothers and other identified groups. VEG is an Implementing Partner of the Ghanaian government in its fight against HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases; at the Lady Volta Center, the organization provides peer education training for youth, after school clubs, and school clubs. Year after year, we have run workshops in drawing, writing, and life skills to promote healthy self-image and building confidence in young women.

The LADY VOLTA Green Tech Academy opened in 2015 in partnership with the NGO SVAfrica, with the *Charge-Up Ghana* project in order to solve two main challenges: the Lack of Electricity and the Gender Gap. In terms of electricity, in the Volta Region, where VEG is located, less than 65% of the households are connected to the electricity grid and more than 55% of them still use kerosene or wood for lightning.

In terms of Gender Gap, young women undergo a shortage of employment opportunities and the primary occupation is **unpaid** agricultural work. They are often self-employed as merchants of agricultural products and sometimes they have a 2nd or a 3rd job. When women are employed solely in agriculture, they are not likely to earn enough: 72% of women are within the low-income classification of the FAO, compared to 48% of men. When the opportunity of a 2nd or 3rd job exists women in the rural areas are typically disadvantaged: They earn one fifth of what a man does.

Our idea is to train every year 20 marginalized youth, **mostly** women, as solar power specialists and electricians;

To develop and produce affordable solar power products (phone chargers, lamps, mini-grids) and to sell solar power products in the rural areas of Ghana.

Pre-Arrival

Visa

Visa costs may differ depending what country you hold citizenship. You should check with the nearest Ghanaian Consulate to find out exactly what is needed. Note that you can obtain a visa to Ghana only from your country of residence. A letter of invitation and sometimes a copy of the ID of the manager of the organization in Ghana are needed, which we can supply to you upon request.

You will need to provide two addresses on the Visa forms. The names and addresses for contacts in Ghana are as follows:

Village Exchange Ghana
Mr. Confidence Coffie, Program Manager
PO Box 756
Ho, Volta Region
Tel: +233 24 320 9170

Sally Adjetei
VEG Board member
Boi Road Abokobi, (Ga East District)
House Nr.101
Tel: +233 24 451 0247

Medical

The Yellow Fever Vaccine is the only compulsory vaccination required for entry into Ghana. You need to get this within 10 days of travel to Ghana. It is also suggested to be up to date on all other vaccinations such as, Hepatitis, Typhoid, Tetanus, etc.

Malaria is also a major concern for travelers in this region of the world. There are many different malaria

medications on the market. It is advised you speak with your physician on what is the best choice for you.

You may also want to bring other medications like pain relievers, etc.

VEG also requires that its volunteers have insurance that will cover them while abroad.

In case of emergencies, there is a regional hospital located in Ho. There are also clinics that VEG staff is familiar with (in non-emergency cases). If case of serious illness, VEG staff is also familiar with reputable clinics located in Accra.

Flights

There were flights that arrived daily to Accra from the US and Europe (Delta, British Airways, Lufthansa, and KLM-Air France).

A VEG representative holding a sign with your name on it will pick you up from the airport. Please send your travel itineraries to Confidence, Program Manager, at coffieconfidence.cc@gmail.com with copy to Christiane, Executive Director, at cmilev@villageexchangeinternational.org. This will ensure that someone will be at the airport to meet you.

What to Bring

While you can find many foreign products in Accra, it may be more difficult to find all your familiar products here in Ho. It is suggested you bring enough insect repellent and high SPF sun block to last.

If you are arriving in the rainy season, you may want to bring a light rain jacket.

Items to Bring (This is not comprehensive list, just a few useful items)

Laptop

Flash light

Movies

Books

Backpack for weekend trips

Bathing Suit

Light clothing

Insect Repellent

Office Environment and Policies

Office Hours

The office is open Monday-Friday 8AM-5PM with a one-hour lunch break. Volunteers can take lunch at the office on request, where there is a restaurant. There are also several national holidays, for which the office is closed. Usually you will be informed the week prior when there is a day off.

Staff

Our staff is primarily Ghanaian and consists of a director, a school manager, an administrative assistant, a RSMH project manager (working with VEG and another organization), a project manager for technical projects, teachers, a security guard and a cleaner. The staff members are very friendly and approachable,

and it is encouraged you take time to get to know them.

Office Culture

The office culture has been described by previous volunteers as friendly, relaxed, and welcoming. We try to keep a positive environment around the office. If you have any issues with projects you are working on (lack of tasks, goals, etc.), you should talk to your counterpart. It may take some prompting on your part—often staff do not want to overwork volunteers, while volunteers have a different work mentality—but if things do not improve you may talk to the director who will in turn discuss the issue with the project staff.

There are cultural differences working in an office in Ghana from what you might have experienced at home. You should be aware that sometimes tasks take longer to accomplish than you expected.

Differences in communication have also been areas that volunteers struggle. English is the official language and is used frequently, but Ewe is also very common in the office. It is often a rewarding experience to try and learn a few words in Ewe while you are here. You will find people will be very eager to teach you. Communication may not be as direct as you are accustomed. People can be perceived as vague in responses but just be aware of this and keep asking until you get the response you need.

Volunteer's Role

As a volunteer at VEG, we strive to make you feel a part of the VEG team. We invite you to take an active role in the work you are doing. If you see a need you think you could fulfill, please let us know, and we can work together to help you accomplish your goals. It is also a good idea to think ahead of time of what your role will be and to prepare a job description. If we make together a list of your goals or objectives early in your arrival here, everyone will have a better idea of what can be done to work towards them. The staff tries their best to use volunteers' skills, but volunteers also need to be aware of what skills they have and are willing to offer.

VEG House



VEG House



VEG Office

About VEG Compound

The house where volunteers stay is located in town, about a ten minutes taxi drive from downtown Ho. The house has three bedrooms, two toilets/baths, kitchen, a porch and living room. They come with a fan and mosquito nets on each window.

Below are a few basic rules that we have outlined to help your stay with us be as pleasant and as enjoyable an experience as possible for yourselves and for VEG. If you have any questions regarding anything in this document, please do not hesitate to ask.

VEG Senior Staff 2025

Executive Director: Christiane Milev

School Manager: Confidence Coffie

Reproductive, Sexual and Maternal Health Program Manager: Kofi Nyalimba

Technical Project Manager: Juliet Atigah

Safety and Security

Ho is probably one of the safest places on earth, nevertheless some common sense rules apply.

A staff member will be present and staying with you during your stay.

Do not let anybody you do not know into the compound, including children. Even if someone says they know someone at VEG and can give a name do not let them in. If somebody is at the entrance, please ask one of the VEG staff to come and meet them there.

House Policies

INTERNET

There is no Internet at the VEG house, nevertheless it is possible to use your phone as a hotspot. The best is to use a local SIM card.

TELEPHONE

Before your trip, you should make sure that your phone is unlocked. In that case, you may buy a local mobile phone SIM card and prepaid units to call locally and internationally at a lower cost.

ENERGY AND WATER SAVING

When exiting rooms, please turn off **all lights and fans**.

At the house, we generally have running water but shortages do happen. If we run out of water, VEG will provide buckets of clean water for showers and toilets. Please make your showers as efficient as possible. Turn off the tap when lathering and keep showers short. The house doesn't have running **hot** water, but you can always ask for a bucket of hot water.

FOOD

VEG will provide food for breakfast, lunch and dinner on request. To ensure that no food is wasted, please notify the cook as early as possible when you will be present for lunch or dinner.

It should be noted that the local food people eat in Ghana can differ a lot from what you are accustomed. For instance, dairy products such as milk, butter, cheese, etc. are not common and should be considered a luxury. Generally, we try to provide a local Ghanaian style lunch and a foreign dish for dinner. However, the foreign meals are made with mostly imported or some substituted ingredients, so there may be some differences in taste.

There is also our restaurant actively operating on the premises that serves both local and some foreign dishes.

LAUNDRY & CLEANING

At request, VEG can provide a laundry service. Laundry should be placed in the laundry basket and will be collected at request. Clean laundry will be returned within 2-3 days, depending on the load.

If you hand-wash some of your clothes, please make sure you dry all clothes outside and they are fully dry before putting them away. The weather is quite humid in Ghana! Also, please take your washing off the line overnight.

All rooms will be cleaned at least twice weekly by VEG's caretaker and the sheets will be changed every week.

One large bath towel and one small hand towel for each volunteer will be provided and changed once a week. If you prefer to change your towel more often, you may want to bring a towel with you from home.

Volunteers should also not leave dirty towels in their rooms. Please place your old towels in the hamper in front of the VEG house. While VEG does have someone that cleans the house, we ask you to be respectful and try to clean up after yourself.

About Ho



Courtesy: <https://www.pinterest.com/hellenakerali/adomonline>

Getting around

Ho is a small town and people are friendly and often eager to help. Do not be afraid of talking to people, whether it is just to say hi, or to ask for directions. If someone can help you, they will.

TAXIS

Taxis and tricycles are the local forms of public transport. They are cheap, easy to use, and run frequently from around 6am to 9-10pm. They travel on random routes and will pick people up and drop them off according to whether they are going in the same direction.

We also have a car that will take you to the office and back.

Nevertheless, if you need to take a shared taxi on your own, please note:

Prices are set (please check with local staff how much you are supposed to pay). Prices may increase as it gets later in the evening if you are travelling by yourself.

To get a taxi give a one- or two-word name for where you are going (e.g. “KK House”). If the driver is going that way he may nod or tell you to “come”. Make sure you have either coins or GH¢1.00 or GH¢2.00 notes. Anything bigger and the taxi driver may not have change. Do not ask the price – that is when taxi drivers know you are new and may try to charge you too much. Know the price beforehand (ask a VEG staff member) and give the exact amount. If you do not have the exact amount, the driver will give you change (know how much change you need!).

When you get to where you want to go tell the taxi driver any of the following:

“Here is ok”

“I’ll get down here”

“Here”

If you are not sure where to get down, ask the driver: “(the name of the place you’re going to) - you’ll tell me where to get down?” Other passengers will probably help as well if they see the driver has not understood or that you are new to Ho.

GOING OUT FROM THE VEG COMPOUND

The best thing is to walk to the road and wait there for a taxi going to town.

GETTING TO THE VEG COMPOUND

The VEG Office and compound is located next to Hoviefe Junction. Taxis are available to and from town and the taxi driver should be told “Hoviefe Junction” and the VEG Office is about 100m further on the same side, painted burgundy color and just on the right.

Shopping

Market day in Ho is every 5 days: if Market day is on Monday this week, the next one will be on Friday, then on Tuesday of the following week, etc. Even when it isn’t market day, a good number of stalls are still selling basic foodstuffs and other goods. Market days are always an interesting, colorful experience and should be explored within your first week in Ho.

There are also a couple of mini-supermarkets selling some “Western” foods. The two largest ones are called “Stadium Gate Shopping Center” and “Melcom” which are located on a street perpendicular to the Ho Sports Stadium. Most taxi drivers will know it if you tell them “Stadium Gate” or “Melcom”!!!

Items like cloths, artwork, and souvenirs, etc. can involve negotiating or haggling the price, especially if bought in a market. As time goes on you’ll learn to know the real price of things and hone in on your negotiation skills.

Negotiating should be an enjoyable exchange and is part of the fun of buying crafts in markets and smaller shops. When starting to negotiate, ask what the “first price” is. Discussions will then go on in terms of first and last price, but you don’t need to accept the initial “last price”. Most customers will suggest an initial price that is either a third or half of the first price. Then the bargaining begins. Observe other people haggling and see how they do it. Haggling takes time, so do not expect to reach an agreed price in 5 minutes.

Not everyone will negotiate, especially in some of the bigger cloth shops and boutiques. As a general rule, pay what you feel you are ready to pay for an item! If someone is insisting on a price that you think is too high, but they are sticking to it, do not assume it is the right price. In some of the larger craft markets in Accra, people will stick to a high price as they know eventually a tourist or traveler will come along and pay it. There are many people producing the same wonderful crafts so if one person is not giving you a good price, ask around!

Going Out

There are a number of “drinking spots” and “chop bars” around Ho. Feel free to ask us about them or to explore on your own. Generally speaking, food in chop bars and from street vendors is safe and clean, although it may often be quite spicy. If people have a problem it is usually only from salad from street vendors as their digestion is not yet used to the different foods, and usually only causes a bit of diarrhea the next morning.

Live music events, dancing events and the like are quite rare in Ho. In the event that you are present for one, they are usually quite safe and friendly. It is of course better to go in a group, which might avoid you some often harmless harassment.

Dress Codes

Men can pretty much get away with anything, although going shirtless / topless around town is inappropriate. When representing VEG for official meetings, a button-down shirt with pants other than jeans is recommended. Ghanaians are often very well dressed, and you don’t want to feel underdressed. In terms of footwear for meetings, a smart pair of sandals or leather shoes are appropriate. Otherwise on a daily basis flip flops or trainers are fine.

For women the dress code is a little stricter. Women are recommended to wear skirts or shorts that are not too short, but things are slowly changing. For meetings, a smart vest or top, and skirt or trousers are recommended (not shorts), with a smart pair of flip flops or sandals for footwear.

Feel free to ask anyone at VEG for advice in case of doubt.

People

Local people in Ho are generally from the Ewe tribe and Volta Region is known as being one of the nicest and friendliest places in Ghana. Foreigners are still something of a novelty and while there have been foreigners around for years, in Ho it has not been in great numbers and people are still excited to meet someone from abroad.

In the past, everyone used to shake hands, and men (and sometimes women) would click the middle fingers as they let go of the shake.

Walking around you will hear yourself being called “Yevu”. This means “white person” and is mostly shouted by small children who just want to say hello. While it is nice to be able to say hello to everyone, do not feel you always have to respond if you do not feel like it.

Women (both foreigners and Ghanaians) in Ho may find themselves subject to various declarations of love and marriage from the most unlikely of sources. It is just a way for a guy to be talking to you. If anyone asks for your telephone number, feel free to tell them “it’s not necessary” and just walk away. Keep the mood light as no-one is ever intending to offend and would be very surprised if they upset you. If someone is persistent, just tell them you have to ask your husband. Men can be extremely flirtatious but can be quickly put off if you are straight with them that you are not interested from the start.

You may hear other volunteers or us talking about “flashing”. “Flashing” refers to a mobile phone practise in which people ring each other but only let it ring 1-3 times and then hang up. This can either mean someone is saying hello, that they have received your text, or that they want you to call them back so you can say hello to them, and they do not have or do not want to use their own call credit. Never feel you have to respond to flashes and do be careful of who you give your number to. Some people like to flash when they have first woken up, early in the morning!

People in Ho and the surrounding villages are amazingly hospitable. When you visit a project site or clients, people will want to chat with you, may give you drinks and / or food, and may ask you to try some of the local gin (akpeteshie).

Meeting people, sharing the cultural practises, and exploring Ho and Ghana are all part of the experience and can be the start of new friendships, new experiences and new jobs! We hope you have a fantastic stay with us and enjoy being a part of the VEG and Ho community!

Telephone Numbers (call at any time, day or night in case of anything!)

Christiane	+33 689239471 (on WhatsApp)
Confidence	+233 24 320 9170 (on WhatsApp)
Juliet	+233 54 661 1340 (on WhatsApp)

Tourism Information

Whilst Ho is a quiet place in the evenings, there can be plenty to do, especially on weekends or if you are interested in learning a new skill. For the evenings, cultural activities can be organized on request. We can recommend:

- Ewe language classes
- Batik classes
- Cooking classes

Please note that some classes can attract extra cost if you need a teacher for ex. for Ewe classes. But at the office, you can observe and work with our staff at no cost even if it is not part of your job. If you find your own teachers and need advice on what a good price is, we’ll be glad to help.

If you want to travel in the Ho area during the weekend there are some easy ways to get to sites that can be done as a day trip, or as a weekend away. Here are some suggestions:

- Mount Adaklu – semi-difficult hike up a “big hill” with a view of Ho and the surrounding plains;
- Kpetoe – community known for its kente cloth weavers. There is a small association of weavers with a guide who can talk about the kente – what the patterns and colors mean, and organize sales if you wish to buy any;
- Kpando – town 5 minutes’ drive from Lake Volta; has pottery, the Hardthaven project (children’s home), fantastic banku with tilapia and nearby is a catholic “shrine”;
- Wli – the largest waterfall in West Africa;
- Amedzofe – allegedly the highest inhabited village in Ghana. Includes a hike and waterfall;
- Mountain Paradise Lodge – lodge at Biakpa, in the hills near Amedzofe. The lodge can organize hikes (including waterfalls) and has bikes to rent;
- Xavi – a community run bird watching boat tour and baobab grove;
- Kyabobo National Park in Northern Volta Region - you’ll need a couple days for this one. Hiking, camping, and currently developing tubing in the local river when the water levels are high enough. Very scenic.

For other options around Ho and throughout Ghana, please consult the guide books. For the most comprehensive information on Ghana, check out The Bradt Ghana Travel Guide. We will be happy to answer questions, help you arrange itineraries and recommend hotels.

ENJOY YOUR STAY!