

VOLUNTEERING ON THE HOLY ISLE



Lama Yeshe Rinpoche's vision for the Holy Isle

Lama Yeshe Rinpoche, who took over stewardship of the island in 1992, is the founder and vision holder of the Holy Isle Project. Lama Yeshe is a Tibetan Buddhist meditation master in the Kagyu tradition and Abbot of Samye Ling Monastery in Dumfriesshire, where he lives most of the year.

Since Lama Yeshe established the Holy Isle Project, hundreds of volunteers from all walks of life and from every faith tradition and none have made their own unique contribution to his vision of positive, life-affirming service; from long-term residents to those who come for just a few weeks or a few months. Through their service, volunteers aspire to develop loving kindness and compassion, to care for the environment and to practice ethical living.

An extract from the forward to the Holy Isle Book, written by the head of the Kagyu lineage, His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, best sums up Lama Yeshe's vision for the Holy Isle Project:

"...the values and aims of the Holy Isle Project correspond with my own personal vision of how the world could be, a place of safety, peace and harmony for all sentient beings. Projects such as the Holy Isle are like a beacon, clearly demonstrating alternative ways of interacting with others and with the environment, bringing possibilities for change, hope for the future, and furthering the cause of world peace.

Tibetan Buddhist culture is represented in many different forms on Holy Isle but because the island is dedicated to nurturing spirituality and exploring the deeper meaning of life, its facilities are open to people of all faiths or none..."



The Centre for World Peace and Health

At the north end of the island, Lama Yeshe has built the Centre for World Peace and Health, a multi-faith guesthouse and retreat centre, with accommodation for up to 60 guests coming to do courses and short retreats.

The Centre and the surrounding environment are cared for by a small team of around 12 full time volunteers, who commit to work on the island for a full season (April to October), with additional volunteers coming for shorter periods during the busy summer months. The Centre closes at the end of October and from early January we hold a 10-week Winter Retreat. Staffing levels are lower during the quieter winter months.



Five Golden Rules

Lama Yeshe requests that everyone who visits or stays on the island follow the Five Golden Rules:

- ❖ to respect life and refrain from killing and acts of violence or aggression
- ❖ to respect other people's property and refrain from stealing, and from taking that which is not given
- ❖ to speak the truth and refrain from lying, gossiping and negative speech
- ❖ to encourage health and refrain from intoxicants (including alcohol, cigarettes/vapes and drugs)
- ❖ to respect others and refrain from casual sexual activity or sexual activity which could cause harm to other people

Please note that Holy Isle is not a rehabilitation centre and we are unable to offer support for people with current drink or drug issues, nor for those who have been through rehab in the last two years.

The Holy Isle Project is unable to offer support for people with mental health illness and we cannot accept responsibility for the mental health of our visitors.



Volunteering

In general, on the Holy Isle we try to follow Samye Ling founder Akong Rinpoche's motto, to "Help Where Help is Needed". We aim to work as a team to create a supportive and friendly space for guests and volunteers alike. The Holy Isle is a joyous place to live and work but running a guesthouse and retreat centre providing for up to 60 guests can be physically and emotionally demanding, so volunteers need to be...

- ...easy-going and committed to working as part of a team
- ...committed to being active participants in community life
- ...mature and robust, with a commitment to developing self-awareness
- ...self-managing, responsible and able to support and contribute to the community's values as well as its structures and routines

Volunteering - Trial period

If you are considering full-time volunteering with us, it is important to have a trial period, which gives you and the community an opportunity to see if you are suited to life on a small island in a small community.

Initially, we ask prospective volunteers to do a two-week try-out period on the following basis:

- 14 days, including travel days
- Approx. 6 hours every day with 2 days off
- Dormitory accommodation (we'll put you in a single room for all or part of the trial period if one is available)
- You are welcome to join the daily programme of meditation and Tibetan chanting practice
- We usually assign volunteers to one main area, by mutual agreement (see below). We will not require you to work in area you really do not want to, although the nature of the place and the tasks that arise requires a flexible approach.

On arrival, an experienced staff member will show you round, answer any queries and introduce you to the other members of the community – often over the evening meal! In the first day or two, either the Centre Coordinator or an experienced staff member will give you a general induction and a member of your team will give you an induction to your department.

For general information about the centre and island, you can read the Welcome Pack in your room. If you have questions, feel free to ask any of the existing community members, however obvious you think the answers may be.

Following this initial fortnight, all being well, we will invite you to stay on or, if your intention is just to complete the trial period, we will keep you in our volunteer pool for future opportunities.

There will be further opportunities to check in and review during the first month of your stay, following your trial, to ensure that volunteering on the Holy Isle is working both for you and for the community as a whole.

The working week and time off

We plan for a working week of approximately 35 hours with 2 days off. In general, we aim to adopt a flexible and cooperative approach to our work and to taking time away from Holy Isle. We recognise that during busy times, we may find ourselves working longer hours and then taking our rest during quieter periods. We recognise that volunteers have different needs regarding time away from the island. We try to reflect this in taking appropriate time off.

All volunteers offer their work on an unpaid basis with lodgings provided in and around the Centre and full board.



Volunteering - Visas

Please be aware that the UK has restrictions on any work, including volunteering, that foreign nationals are allowed to do whilst on a tourist visa (or equivalent visa-free entry) in this country. Now that the UK has left the European Union, these restrictions apply also to EU citizens, unless they have UK Settled Status, or pre-Settled Status.

The UK Home Office 'Immigration Rules' state:

'Volunteering

A visitor may undertake incidental volunteering (i.e. the main purpose of the visit is not to volunteer), provided it lasts no more than 30 days in total and is for a charity that is registered with either the Charity Commission for England and Wales; the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland; or the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.'

Please note that it is your responsibility to ensure you have the correct status to undertake volunteering with us. We are a registered charity but we cannot help you with visa applications.

Volunteering - the Volunteer Team

The Holy Isle staff covers the following areas:

Holy Isle Project Manager - Zangpo has a strong connection to the Holy Isle, having lived and worked here for many years in the '90s before moving across to the Men's Retreat on Arran, where he spent eight years in retreat, followed by six years of study and practice at Sekar Retreat in Nepal under Drupon Rinpoche.

Zangpo returned to live on the Holy Isle in 2022, where he is Manager of the Centre for World Peace and Health, along with having oversight of the Women's Retreat at the south end of the island and the Men's Retreat on Arran.

Centre Coordinator - deals with bookings, course programming, liaising with the Holy Isle Ferry and looking after the coming and going of guests and the day-to-day admin of the Centre. The Centre Coordinator is also responsible for volunteer coordination.

Kitchen – a core team of three or four, helped by guests and short-term helpers, provides vegan/vegetarian food for up to 60 guests and volunteers and works closely with our Garden Team

The 'Monks Orchard' and 'Wish-Fulfilling' organic vegetable gardens – a team of three or four, helped by guests and short-term helpers, grows organic vegetables based mostly on bio-dynamic principles. The team's work includes preparing beds, seeding, transplanting, planting, weeding, compost making and harvesting. The team works closely with the Holy Isle kitchen

House Care/Day Visitors – a team of three creates the environment to welcome our guests and to look after them. During the high season, members of the House Care team 'meet and greet' the boats bringing on day visitors, introducing the island and staffing the 'The Boathouse' – our information centre and shop – where day visitors can rest and take tea.

Maintenance – One-person handles the daily, small-scale jobs, with additional support for larger-scale projects.

Environment – team of two. Since the mid-nineties, we have planted more than 30,000 native species trees. The Environment Manager manages the woodland, along with ongoing rhododendron and bracken control and path maintenance.

The 'Mandala' flower garden – run by two long-term volunteers

Community Living



Developing a daily practice – Whether you already have or wish to develop one, Lama Yeshe invites us to use our time on the Holy Isle as an opportunity to develop a mindfulness meditation practice, traditionally known as ‘calm abiding’ meditation (Sanskrit: *shamata*; Tibetan: *shinay*). For those who are new to this practice, instruction is available. We have a little shrine room and a daily meditation and prayer schedule and you are very welcome to take part. The door is always open and you are welcome to use the shrine room for your own practice outside of the regular meditation schedule.

Community Meetings - Along with regular team meetings, regular admin meetings give the community a chance to check in on matters relating to the day-to-day running of the guesthouse.

Periodically, we take the opportunity to check in on a deeper level than is possible during an admin meeting. This can be an open forum or an opportunity to address specific issues.

Community activities – we gather to watch films or to have a ceilidh, sometimes in the community yurt or in The Boathouse.

Community Living – Boundaries

Interactions with guests and visitors

Guests and volunteers are all sharing the same space. As part of enabling people to relax in a safe environment, Lama Yeshe feels it is important not to start any sexual relationships on the island between volunteers and visiting guests. These clear boundaries are in place to help create a non-threatening space for everyone to progress on their own inner journey and to protect both visitors and staff.

Quiet time in the centre

After 10pm at night is quiet time for guests and volunteers throughout the centre. Please be aware of this, especially in the offices and the dining room, as guest bedrooms are directly above and the ceilings are quite thin. If guests and other volunteers are being noisy in these areas after 10pm, feel free to remind them gently that it is quiet time.

Alcohol

Our guests may notice even a small amount of alcohol so we recommend strongly that, if you wish to drink more than a glass of wine or beer when you are on Arran, you stay overnight on Arran as part of your allocated days off. If you are seen to be under the influence on Holy Isle, you will be asked to leave.

Music & films

Please do not play music and films anywhere where other people may hear them. Keep the sound down in your own room so that the people in adjoining rooms will not be disturbed. This helps provide a place for guests that is away from all the usual distractions of modern life.



Practical Issues

Travel

Our website includes a 'Getting Here' section. Travel to Holy Isle is via Ardrossan Harbour on the Ayrshire coast, from where a ferry service runs to Brodick on the Isle of Arran.

On arriving at Brodick, you will need to take bus 323 (which meets the Ardrossan ferry) to Lamlash from where the Holy Isle ferry runs.

Ardrossan Harbour is easily accessible from Glasgow Central Station, Glasgow Airport and Prestwick Airport, with ferries leaving for the 55-minute journey to Arran at 09.45, 12.30 and 15.15, connecting through to Holy Isle at 11.00, 14.00 and 17.00. Please note that the crossings to and from Holy Isle can be affected by the timing of low tide in Lamlash Bay, so on some days the Holy Isle Ferry will not be able to make the crossings described above. Holy Isle Reception will confirm crossing times with you when you make your booking.

Bed linen and towels

Holy Isle supplies all linen and towels – the House Care team will point you in the right direction.

Internet and telephone

We have reasonably robust broadband, given our relative isolation but we do not have general WiFi. We do have a WiFi area, although access may be limited when a retreat is in progress. We have two computers for internet access for volunteers.

Mobile reception is variable, depending on your network. Currently, there is good 4G signal from the EE network.

We ask all guests and volunteers to refrain from using phones and other electronic devices anywhere within the public areas of the Centre and the surrounding gardens.

There is one outgoing phone and UK calls are free up to 60 minutes. Please be mindful that during the day, these phones are located in working offices.

Special diets

The Holy Isle Kitchen caters for vegan, gluten free, dairy free and sugar free diets. For diagnosed coeliacs, however, we cannot guarantee an environment 100% free from gluten contamination. We are not able to offer any special diets.